

GOOD HABITS, GOOD STUDENTS

**A Complete Guide for Students
Who Want to Succeed**

by
Eric T. MacKnight

Illustrations by
Michelle Jennison



Llumina Press

First Edition 2006

<http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>

Manuscript editor: Phil Freshman, Minneapolis

© 2006 Eric T. MacKnight

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from both the copyright owner and the publisher.

Requests for permission to make copies of any part of this work should be mailed to Permissions Department, Llumina Press, PO Box 772246, Coral Springs, FL 33077-2246

ISBN: 1-59526-574-0

Printed in the United States of America by Llumina Press

Library of Congress Control Number: 2006920261

GOOD HABITS, GOOD STUDENTS:

*A Complete Guide for Students
Who Want to Succeed*

Acknowledgements and Dedication

I am grateful to the many colleagues and former colleagues who generously offered their suggestions to help me improve this book, and to the students who have taught me most of what I know about habits and everything else. Phil Freshman edited the manuscript. Whatever order and consistency you find here is thanks to him. Finally, *Good Habits, Good Students* is lovingly dedicated to my best habits: Sean, Rachel, and Jennifer.

Good Habits at a Glance

Personal Habits

- Practice moral courage.
- Be honest and reliable.
- Treat everyone with respect and courtesy.
- Take responsibility for your mistakes.
- Read every day.
- Arrive on time.
- Have a question?
Ask your teacher!
- Have a problem?
Tell your teacher!
- Drink lots of water.
- Exercise regularly.
- Eat properly, get enough sleep, and stay drug-free.

Work Habits

- Use a homework diary in every class, every day.
- Use class time productively.
- Complete all your assignments.
- File your papers where you can find them.
- Do homework as soon as it's assigned—not the day before it's due!
- Hand in work on time.
- Come to class prepared.
- Keep a copy of major assignments.
- Be responsible about making up work when you have been absent.

Study Habits

- Find a place and time for studying that works for you.
- Review your classes every day.
- Take study breaks to help you stay awake and alert.
- Use a planning calendar for projects.
- Learn how to behave during formal examinations.
- Practice good exam-taking strategies.
- Review tests and essays when you get them back.
- Practice good study skills.

Study Skills

- Read textbooks efficiently.
- Take notes effectively.
- Learn how to prepare for tests

Imagine . . .

It's your summer holiday, and you're walking along a beautiful, deserted beach. The wet sand oozes between your toes. The salt breeze blows in your hair. The seabirds run up and down as the waves roll in, then recede.

In the water up ahead, a strange shape catches your eye. As you approach, the waves wash it onshore. When you get close enough, you see that it's some kind of old jar. No, wait—it's a bottle, the glass so dark it's almost black. And sure enough, it's sealed with a cork that is covered with red wax.

"Cool!" you exclaim.

The wax is old and brittle, and with a bit of effort you are able to pry it loose. After some tugging, you succeed in pulling out the cork.

If there was ever something inside that bottle, it evaporated long ago. You turn it upside down and shake it, but nothing falls out and nothing rattles.

Oh well, you think. At least it's a cool old bottle.

Then a thin trail of mist begins wafting up out of the bottle, growing into a cloud that hangs in the air just in front of you. Suddenly—bang!--a genie appears where the cloud had been. A genie! Just like in the old stories, dressed like someone out of A Thousand and One Arabian Nights, with one ring through his nose and another in his left ear.

"Greetings, my friend," says the genie, bowing slightly. "A thousand thanks for freeing me from my imprisonment. I am ready to grant your wish."

"Whoa!" you say. "This is so cool! What'll I wish for? Hmm . . . I could wish to be the richest person on the planet, or an Olympic athlete, or a famous singer, or—"

"Hold it!" cries the genie. "Let me explain. I'm not like those genies in the stories. I'm an Education Genie, and I only grant wishes that have to do with education."

"What?! You mean, out of all the genies in the world trapped in bottles, I have the rotten luck of freeing an Education Genie?"

"If you're that disappointed," says the genie, "we can forget the whole thing, and I'll just be on my way."

"No, no," you say. "Wait, I'll think of something." Then, an idea. "Could I wish for my math teacher to take early retirement?"

“No,” says the genie. “I’m not a School Genie. I’m an Education Genie. It has to be something about education.” Seeing the puzzled look on your face, he adds, “About learning.”

“Oh,” you say, unable to conceal your disappointment. “Okay, let’s see, three wishes about learning . . .”

The genie clears his throat. “Who said anything about three wishes?”

“I don’t get three wishes?”

“You’ve been reading too many old stories,” says the genie. “You get one wish.”

“One wish?”

“One.”

Oh boy. So you start thinking. You could wish to be a genius. But Melvin, the guy in your class who’s closest to being a genius, isn’t the most popular kid around... and he doesn’t even get the best grades. He always seems to be thinking about something totally different when the teacher calls on him. So maybe being a genius isn’t the best idea.

You ask yourself: what’s the one thing you don’t have, that you really need to help you do better in school? Hmm . . . No idea.

That’s it! Ideas! Wouldn’t it be great to be one of those students who’s always got an idea, or even several ideas? Like Lucy Dobner. She’s got ideas and inspiration to burn. Maybe you should wish for inspiration.

But then you remember that Lucy Dobner, for all her great ideas, is the most disorganized person on Earth. She forgets stuff all the time, her homework is always late . . . and she doesn’t get the best marks, either. Maybe inspiration isn’t the best thing to wish for.

Who does get the best grades? It’s usually either Janice or Chris. They’re not the smartest in the class, so what do they do that’s so successful? Well . . . they always pay attention, they write down all the assignments, they turn in their homework on time, and they never seem to have to cram for tests. They just have really good work habits.

That’s it! Habits! You start thinking about your own habits and realize that they could certainly stand some improvement.

“Okay,” you say. “I’m ready. My wish is to have great habits.”

“Are you sure?” asks the genie. “I’ve had many unhappy experiences with people making wishes and then wishing they’d wished for something else.”

"I'm sure," you say, "I've thought it all through carefully. The best thing to improve my grades would be if I had better habits. That's my wish."

"Did you consider other alternatives?" asks the genie.

"Yes," you say, growing impatient. "I thought about being a genius, but that's no guarantee of success. And I thought about being inspired with great ideas, but I don't want to risk having great ideas without being able to follow through on them. So the best thing to have is good habits. Let's get on with it. I should have been back an hour ago, and I'm getting hungry."

"All right," the genie sighs. "Your wish is granted. From now on you will have excellent habits, and as a result you will earn much better grades."

"You don't seem very happy about it," you say.

"You made the wrong choice."

"What!?"

"You made the wrong choice," he repeats.

"But why? I reasoned it all out very carefully!"

"If a genie offers to make your wish come true," he explains, "you should wish for something you couldn't possibly get on your own. You can improve your habits, if you really want to. You can even do things to become more inspired. But no matter what you do, you can't turn yourself into a genius. You should have wished to be a genius."

With a groan, you plop down onto the sand. "I'm such a loser!"

"Well," says the genie, "I must be off now. Good luck!"

"Wait," you say. "I have one more question."

"Make it quick."

"You say anyone can improve his habits. How?"

The genie seems a bit offended by such an easy question.

"It's nothing difficult," he replies. "Read this book."



Table of Contents

Foreword	i
The Importance of Habits	ii
How to Use This Book	v
 Part One: How to Improve Your Habits	
Chapter One: Test Yourself: How Good Are Your Habits?	1
Chapter Two: Where Do You Need to Improve?	5
Chapter Three: Setting Goals: The Path to Improvement	7
Chapter Four: Getting Help From Parents and Teachers	11
Chapter Five: A Plan of Action	15
 Part Two: Good Habits for Good Students	
Chapter Six: Eleven Personal Habits	19
Practice Moral Courage	19
Be Honest and Reliable	21
Treat Everyone With Respect and Courtesy	22
Take Responsibility for Your Mistakes	23
Read Every Day	24
Arrive on Time	26
Have a Question? Ask Your Teacher!	27
Have a Problem? Tell Your Teacher!	28
Drink Lots of Water	29
Exercise Regularly	30
Eat Properly, Get Enough Sleep, and Stay Drug-Free	31
Chapter Seven: Nine Work Habits	33
Use a Homework Diary in Every Class, Every Day	33
Use Class Time Productively	35
Complete All Assignments	36
File Your Papers Where You Can Find Them	38
Do Homework as Soon as It's Assigned—Not the Day Before It's Due!	39

Hand in Work on Time	40
Come to Class Prepared	41
Keep a Copy of Major Assignments	42
Be Responsible About Making Up Work When You Have Been Absent	43
 Chapter Eight: Seven Study Habits	 45
Find a Place and Time for Studying That Works for You	45
Review Your Classes Every Day	46
Take Study Breaks to Help You Stay Awake and Alert	48
Use a Planning Calendar for Projects	49
Learn How to Behave During Formal Examinations	50
Practice Good Exam-Taking Strategies	51
Review Tests and Essays When You Get Them Back	53
 Chapter Nine: Three Essential Study Skills	 55
Learn How to Read a Textbook Efficiently	55
Take Notes in a Way That Works for You	56
Learn How to Prepare for Tests	57
 Appendix A—Goal-Setting Aids	 59
Set a Goal!	60
Form a Habit	61
Learning Log	62
Homework Tracker	63
Daily Check Sheet	64
Post-Report Evaluation	65
 Appendix B—Sample Goals	 67
 Appendix C—A Note on Learning Disabilities	 73
 Appendix D—A Note to Parents and Teachers: How You Can Help	 75
 Index	 77
For Further Information	79

Foreword

This book describes the essential habits leading to success in school. It is based on my experience teaching in high schools and middle schools for more than twenty years. If you practice these good habits, I guarantee you will find school much easier. You'll enjoy it more, you will learn more, and your grades will improve.

Knowing the habits you *should* have, however, is not enough.

That's why Part One of this book is all about how to improve your habits. It provides a complete set of tools for you to use, and a practical plan of action. Part Two then describes the habits that will lead you to success.

I'm confident that if you follow the program I describe, you will succeed.

A Note About Spelling, Punctuation, and Terminology

After emigrating from the United States to Canada and spending so many years teaching in international schools around the world, I'm afraid my approach to these issues is rather flexible. For example, is it *color*, or *colour*? Do periods and commas go inside quotation marks (American style), or do they go outside unless they're part of the quotation (British style)? Do you wear *trousers*, or *pants*?

Similarly, school lingo varies from place to place. Some students keep track of their schedules and assignments in an *agenda*; others use a *day planner*, or an *organizer*, or a *homework diary*. Some students receive *marks*, while others earn *grades*. Some get *report cards* each term; others simply get *reports*. Some go to *college* after *high school*, while others attend *university* after *secondary school*.

As the good Canadian I aspire to be, I adhere firmly to a policy of compromise. I prefer *behaviour* to *behavior*. I like the British practice of putting commas outside quotation marks unless they're part of the quotation—but I use double quotation marks, not singles, and I don't call them "inverted commas". When it comes to terminology, expect to find British, American, and Canadian variations from time to time, and enjoy the diversity. If something really confuses you, go to my Web site (<http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>) and lodge a complaint. I promise to respond!

The Importance of Habits

You can improve your habits all by yourself, and you don't have to be a genius to do it.

Throughout my years of teaching I've seen one simple truth demonstrated again and again. Here it is:

Students with good habits are more successful.

That's it. Forget all the arguments about who's intelligent, who isn't, what intelligence is, how (or if) it can be measured, and so on. It doesn't matter who you are: if you have good habits, you do better. And if you have poor habits, you do worse.

The most important task of a student, especially between ages 12 and 17, is to acquire and practice good habits until those habits become automatic. Ask me to predict the future success of any student in those grades, and I will ask first about his or her habits.

You can develop good habits, and you can break any bad ones you may already have. You don't need any secret powers or special talents. You just need a little information and guidance, and that's what this book will provide. The rest is a simple matter of desire, determination, and help from parents, teachers, and friends.

How do habits form? Repetition.

The more we do anything, the more we tend to repeat doing it.

For example, years ago I traveled to a big city. To protect myself against pickpockets, I put my wallet in the front pocket of my trousers. After a while, putting my wallet in my back pocket felt wrong. So I continued putting my wallet in the front pocket, and now if it isn't there, I immediately sense its absence.

So repetition forms habits. The only question is, will they be good habits or bad ones?

Bad habits form more easily than good habits, because they require less effort. We take the easy way, do the lazy thing, and if we repeat it long enough, guess what? We have formed a habit.

It makes no small difference, then, whether we form good habits from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather *all* the difference.

**—Aristotle, Greek philosopher
(384-322 BC)**

When I was a boy, my mother made my bed for me. As a result, I acquired the habit of leaving my bed unmade in the morning—a habit I still have today.

My mother also made lunch for me when I was in school. Later, in university, I ate lunch in the cafeteria. But when I began teaching, it was inconvenient for me to eat in the school cafeteria, so I had to bring a sack lunch to work. Having developed the habit of not making my own lunch, it was difficult to change. On many days, I arrived at work only to realize that I had forgotten to make myself a lunch.

Going hungry is a pretty strong motivator, so eventually I changed that habit. Life would have been easier, however, if as a young man I had formed the habit of making my own lunch every school day.

To summarize:

1. Habits form through repetition.
2. Bad habits form more easily, because they require less effort.
3. Once formed, habits are difficult to break. And habits formed when we are young are likely to stay with us all our lives.

The conclusion is clear, isn't it?

The second half of a man's life is made up of nothing but the habits he has acquired during the first half.

**—Fyodor Dostoyevsky,
Russian novelist
(1821-1881)**

Make the effort when young to form good habits, and your life will be easier, more pleasant, and more successful.

How to Use This Book

What's in *Good Habits, Good Students*?

Part One: How to Improve Your Habits

Chapter One provides a short test so you can see just how good—or bad—your habits are at the moment. Chapter Two explains how to use the teachers' comments on your report card to find out where you need to improve. Chapter Three lays out a practical method for improving your habits by setting clear goals. Chapter Four shares tips on how you can get help from parents and teachers. Finally, Chapter Five provides a plan of action.

Part Two: Good Habits for Good Students

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight describe the habits needed for success in school: Personal Habits, Work Habits, and Study Habits. For many of them, I have provided a sample goal-setting activity that will help you get started if you want to improve in that particular area. Chapter Nine describes the four most important study skills.

In **Appendix A** you will find several helpful forms for setting goals and forming habits. Full-sized versions can be downloaded from my Web site, <http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>.

Appendix B includes a complete list of the sample goals that appear in Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight.

Appendix C offers advice to those who have, or suspect they may have, a learning disability.

Appendix D offers advice to parents and teachers who want to help their children or students develop better habits.

What's the Best Way to Read This Book?

Feel free to read these sections in any order you choose. Very few of you, I think, will start at the beginning and read straight through.

Before you begin, however, I urge you to practice one essential habit of good readers: take a few minutes to get an overview of the whole book. You can do this by:

- reading the Table of Contents;
- reading the first and last paragraphs of each chapter; and
- reading just the headings that describe each habit in Part Two.

Once you've done all that, you will have an excellent overall understanding of the book, and a pretty good idea of where you want to begin reading.

What If I Don't Learn Well by Reading Books?

Perhaps you're a strongly visual learner. Maybe you learn best with a hands-on approach. Until the video version of *Good Habits, Good Students* is released, or you enroll in one of my classes, you'll have to work together with someone who *does* learn well by reading—perhaps your mother or father, a brother or sister, or a good friend. Your partner can read the book, and then together you can put the ideas into a form that works best for you.

Even if you *do* learn well by reading, a partner will be a great source of support when laziness tempts you to take a day off, or to give up. Team up, and get started!

Better still: convince one of your teachers to work on improving habits with your whole class. You'll benefit from one another's mistakes, successes, and support.

Part One

How to Improve Your Habits

- 1. Test Yourself: How Good Are Your Habits?**
- 2. Where Do You Need to Improve?**
- 3. Setting Goals: The Path to Improvement**
- 4. Getting Help from Parents and Teachers**
- 5. A Plan of Action**

Chapter 1

Test Yourself:

How Good Are Your Habits?

Total your points for each section, and then turn to the next chapter to see where you need to improve your habits.

Section I: Personal Habits

- A. I do the right thing, even when it's difficult or when others may disagree with me.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- B. I am honest and reliable.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- C. I treat people with respect and courtesy.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- D. I take responsibility for my mistakes.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- E. I ask questions in class, or after class.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- F. If I have a problem, I speak with the teacher as soon as I can.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- G. I read daily.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- H. I drink about two liters of water per day.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always
- I. I exercise regularly.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

J. I eat healthy foods.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

K. I get enough sleep.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

L. I avoid cigarettes, caffeine, and “recreational” drugs.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

Total points for Section I: _____

Section II: Work Habits

A. I don't waste time or fool around. I use class time productively.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

B. I complete my homework assignments.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Always

C. I file my papers where I can easily find them.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Always

D. I do homework when it's assigned—not just before it's due.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

E. I hand work in on time.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

F. I come to class prepared, with all the materials I need.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4- Usually 5-Almost always

G. I keep copies of major assignments such as essays and reports, in case the teacher loses the copy I hand in.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always

H. I make up work I've missed due to absence.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Always

Total points for Section II: _____

Section III: Study Habits and Study Skills

A. I study in a place where my materials are organized and I can concentrate.

1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always

Good Habits, Good Students

- B. I study at times when I am most alert and productive.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always
- C. I review daily.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always
- D. I take study breaks to stay alert.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always
- E. I use a planning calendar for projects.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always
- F. I know how to behave in a formal examination.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always
- G. I practice good test-taking strategies.
1-Never 2-Rarely 3-Sometimes 4-Usually 5-Almost always
- H. I review tests and essays when I get them back.
1-No 2-Sometimes. 3-Yes
- I. I read textbooks efficiently.
1-No 2- Sometimes. 3-Yes
- J. I take effective notes.
1-No 2- Sometimes. 3-Yes
- K. I prepare effectively for tests.
1-No 2- Sometimes. 3-Yes

Total points for Section III: _____

What Does Your Score Mean?

Section I: Personal Habits

12–24 points: Weak

25–47: Medium

48–60: Strong

Section II: Work Habits

8–16 points: Weak

17–31: Medium

32–40: Strong

Section III: Study Habits and Study Skills

11–23: Weak

24–38: Medium

39–47: Strong

Now What?

Where do you need to improve? That depends on your attitude.

I had a student once who earned straight A's in all his subjects. He was fluent in Finnish, English, and German, and also studied French. He carried a demanding course-load, including high-level classes in mathematics, science, and languages. When I asked him, along with my other students, where he needed most to improve, his answer was, "I need to improve in all areas." That kind of attitude leads to high achievement!

Realistically, though, it's difficult to work on improving more than one area at a time. In the next chapter, I explain how you can use teachers' comments on report cards to help decide where you should start.

Chapter 2

Where Do You Need to Improve?

Here's a good way to find out where you need the most improvement: check your report card. Don't just look at the grades, though. Check the comments your teachers write about each subject.

Far too often, when students receive report cards, they check their marks and then stop reading. However, if your reports include comments from each teacher, these can be more useful than the grades when it comes to figuring out what you need to do to improve.

Not all comments by teachers are useful in this way. Some consist mostly of a standard description of what the class has studied in the previous term. There may be only a brief comment on your own work, and sometimes such comments emphasize what is most positive—which is nice, but not helpful if you're trying to identify your weaknesses.

Sometimes, too, teachers' comments are written in a kind of secret code I call "report-speak". "George has a good understanding of blah blah blah", you read. Sounds good. Actually, however, a "good" understanding may be the third- or fourth-best level, below other possibilities like "excellent" and "very good". Once you realize this, "good understanding" doesn't sound so good anymore.

Because comments on reports don't always include the information you're looking for, and because they are sometimes written in report-speak, any attempt to use your report card to discover where you most need to improve must include this vital step: asking your teachers, in person.

Before you speak with them, however, do a bit of preparatory work.

Step 1: Make a simple chart like the Post-Report Evaluation (see Appendix A). Or if you prefer, you can make a separate sheet for each class. Whichever way you do it, leave space for the following information:

- Subject
- Number 1 Area Needing Improvement
- Biggest Obstacle to Improvement
- How to Overcome This Obstacle
- Goal (to Make the Needed Improvement)

- Step 2: Before reading your report card, write *in pencil* what you *think* is the number-one area needing improvement for each subject. Leave the other areas blank, for the moment.
- Step 3: When you receive your report card, compare what you've written in pencil with what each teacher has written in his or her comments. If there is a big difference between what you expected and what a teacher has written, this is something to discuss with the teacher. Note any differences, and also note the subjects in which the teachers' comments didn't really help you identify where you most need to improve.
- Step 4: Ask each teacher for a few moments to talk. Find out where the teacher thinks you need to improve, and clear up any questions about exactly what you need to do better. If you had different ideas about where you need improvement, ask the teacher about this, too. ("I thought my spelling would be the biggest problem, Mr. Jones, but you didn't even mention it on my report card. Why not?")

If you're allowed to attend the parent-teacher meetings that often follow report cards, that is an excellent time to ask these questions. If not, arrange a time after class or after school.

- Step 5: When you've identified the *single* most important area where improvement is needed in each class, look down the list. Do most of your teachers say that your "class participation" needs improvement? Or is there something different in each subject? If the same problem repeats from class to class, that's easy. But beware of report-speak: your problem with "class participation" in History may be that you never raise your hand to answer a question, while your "class participation" problem in English is that you chat constantly with your best friend when you should be paying attention. If the problems are different in every class, pick the class where you most want to improve your grades and work on that one first.
- Step 6: Fill in the next two blanks for the problem you've decided to work on. What is the biggest obstacle to improvement? Maybe you can't concentrate in class because of where you're sitting. Maybe you don't finish your homework on time because your work space at home is filled with distractions. Whatever the main obstacle is, write it down. Next, describe what you could do to overcome this obstacle. If you don't know, ask your teachers or parents for help.
- Step 7: Set a goal! You can establish better habits by setting goals. But before you can set a goal that will really help you, you'll need to read the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Setting Goals: The Path to Improvement

Perhaps your results on the little test in Chapter One surprised you. Maybe they show that you're doing very well, or maybe they leave you feeling discouraged. Whatever your current results are, however, you can improve. And whether your grades are low, medium, or high, the path to improvement begins with setting goals.

Don't try to solve all your problems at once. Pick just *one* area that needs improvement, and work on it until you've reached your goal. To turn your achievement into a new habit, repeat the behaviour you are practicing until it becomes automatic.

Set a realistic goal. Decide in advance what you need to do to meet the goal, how you will measure success, and what your deadline will be. If you fail to reach the initial goal, revise it and try again.

Improvement is like hiking up a mountain: you do it one step at a time. If looking at the peak discourages you, forget about it and concentrate on the next step, and then the next. On the other hand, if looking at the peak inspires you, just keep imagining the fabulous view from the top!

Defining a Goal

A poorly defined goal will be pretty useless. Look at this one:

“My goal is to improve my marks in English.”

This is a nice idea, but it's not a well-defined goal, because it leaves many important questions unanswered. For example, how much improvement is desired? How will the improvement be measured? Over what period of time is the goal to be achieved? What action is required to achieve the goal? How will progress toward the goal be recorded and judged?

A well-defined goal answers these questions right from the beginning. Here's an example:

Goal	To read for 15 minutes every day.
Action required	Establish a fixed time and place to read. Eliminate all possible interruptions, and set a timer for 15 minutes.
How often?	Every day.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary, and also on your wall calendar if you wish.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you read every day for 15 full minutes, give yourself a treat.
Revision	If you fell short, repeat for another week. When you read for seven straight days, give yourself that treat. Then continue, with a treat at the end of each successful week, until the reading itself is a treat. At that point—not before—increase the time to 20 minutes.

Defining goals like this takes practice. To help you out, I've included sample goals with many of the Good Habits described in Part Two of this book. For each of them, the time limit is one week, and I recommend that you begin all your goals with a one-week time limit. Why? It keeps you focused. If you start to slip, the worst that can happen is that you lose a week.

Some goals are hard to define in a way that can be measured or counted. My students, for example, sometimes want to improve their handwriting skills. They set a goal: to write more neatly. But how can someone know whether the handwriting is neater, or how much neater it is? Instead, I tell them to set a goal to practice the skill they want to improve. *Goal: to practice neat handwriting for ten minutes every night.* With a goal like that, you can keep a record and tell whether the ten minutes has been spent on handwriting. And if you *do* practice writing neatly for ten minutes every night, you can be sure that your handwriting will improve.

Monitoring your progress: Keeping a daily written record of your goal-setting activity is crucial. For example, you decide to read for 15 minutes every evening, but you don't keep a daily record. A week later, will you be able to tell exactly how many minutes you have read, on which days? Maybe you will, but maybe you won't. In addition, keeping a daily record means that you remind yourself daily, and these reminders really help keep you on track. And finally, if you can't keep a daily record of your achievement, you probably haven't defined your goal in a way that can be measured. If that's the case, re-read the paragraph just before this one.

Many of you will be tempted to skip the monitoring—don't!

Reminders: Try using a digital calendar or organizer that can send you reminders—a beep, a message on-screen, or an email. This can be a great way to ensure that you don't forget, and an easy way to keep a written record of your goal-setting.

Support: Find a friend who wants to improve his or her habits, and work together to keep each other motivated and on track.

To build a new habit, all you have to do is set a goal, monitor your progress daily, and keep at it—perhaps for weeks, perhaps for months—until the behaviour you are practicing becomes automatic.

In Appendix A, you will find some goal-setting aids:

- **Set a Goal!**, a form for recording your goal, assessing your success, and deciding on the next step.
- **Form a Habit!**, a different version of Set a Goal!, designed to help you work on a single goal over several weeks or months and form a new habit.
- The **Learning Log**, a sheet to help you keep track of your behaviour during class time.
- The **Homework Tracker**, a sheet to help you monitor your good habits regarding homework.
- The **Daily Check Sheet**, to get daily feedback from teachers on how you are doing.
- The **Post-Report Evaluation**, to help you figure out what your report card really means.

If you're not sure where to start, ask a parent or teacher for help in choosing and defining a goal that will work for you. If you've never set a goal before, go ahead and try one that's simple, such as the reading example above. Or choose one of the other sample goals provided in Part Two (also listed in Appendix B). Or start with what I think are the two most fundamental Good Habits: "Read every day" and "Use a homework diary in every class, every day".

Once you have some practice setting goals, monitoring them, and revising them, you'll be able to set goals in every area of your life. You'll be amazed at how easy it is to improve your habits if you work at it systematically.

Chapter 4

Getting Help From Parents and Teachers

Let's face it: in the beginning, we may be filled with enthusiasm and determined to succeed. But as the days and weeks go by, our old tendencies begin to reassert themselves.

Do it the easy way.
Be a little bit lazy.
Take a break.
Do it tomorrow.

And before we know it, our grand plans for improvement have been forgotten.

This is when we need help from others.

Parent Power

Nagging Reminding

Do you ever wish your parents would stop nagging you? "Clean your room! Help with the dishes! Take out the garbage!" It never ends.

You may be surprised, then, at what I am about to say. If you are serious about improving your habits but find that you need help, here's the best thing you can do:

Ask your parents to nag you.

Actually, "nagging" means being reminded of things you would rather forget. In this case, we are talking about things you want to remember. So maybe we should call it "reminding", not nagging.

Perhaps you want to acquire the habit of reading every day. You set a goal to read for 15 minutes every day, and for the first day or two everything's fine. But then you start forgetting.

Ask your parents to remind you. Tell them what your goal is, and put that “parent power” to work on your side.

Organization

Parents can also help with organization. Maybe a wall calendar would help you keep track of your goal-setting activities. Perhaps your mother or father can help you to arrange a schedule that will work for you. Are you being disturbed by your little sister when you’re trying to do homework? Do you need a better place to study?

Don’t try to solve all of these problems yourself. Put your parents to work!

Not only will your parents be able to help you reach your goals—they will also be happy about it. They will be delighted that you are improving your habits, setting goals, and becoming organized.

They might even stop nagging you so much.

Teachers

Error Detection

Teachers can sometimes be too negative. They fall into that trap because it is so much easier to explain what’s *wrong* with your work than it is to say what’s *right* about it. They are very good at pointing out errors and mistakes.

You can use your teachers’ error-detection talents to help you build good habits. My advice here is similar to asking your parents to nag you:

Ask teachers to tell you when you’re messing up.

You may think this is crazy advice, but let me explain.

Even though they spend all day pointing out errors, teachers usually don’t *enjoy* being so negative. They feel guilty.

You can relieve your teachers’ guilty consciences by *asking* them to point out your errors. “Imagine!” they will think, “a student who actually *wants* to hear bad news!” They will be so happy to be able to do what they do best, without feeling guilty. And I want to point out that a happy teacher is usually a nice teacher. A sympathetic teacher. A teacher who, hesitating between a higher mark and a lower mark, might just choose the higher one.

You're beginning to see the strategy here, right?

Teachers are busy people, of course, so you don't want to annoy them by adding unnecessarily to their workload. Instead, make it easy for them. Use the Daily Check Sheet, for example (see Appendix A). Pick one class where you need to improve when it comes to homework, and ask the teacher if he or she would be willing to take 30 seconds at the end of each lesson to fill in your sheet. Most teachers will be impressed that you have taken this initiative by yourself, and very pleased to help. Do this for a week, and then ask the teacher's advice. Should you continue with the Daily Check Sheet for another week? Are there areas where you need to improve that the sheet doesn't mention?

Letting teachers know that you are working to improve your habits will improve their attitude toward you. Once you have gained their trust, once they see that you are committed to improvement, they will be much more willing to spend extra time helping you.

Show them this book, and ask them for their ideas. Where do you need to improve the most? What can you do to improve your test scores, or write better essays, or improve your reading skills? Put your teachers to work for you, and, just like your parents, they will be happy to help.

Expert Information and Advice

Teachers—and school librarians, too—can also help by answering questions about nutrition, sleep, exercise, and the scientific evidence regarding study routines.

They can help you:

- find good books about study skills;
- find good novels to read that are right for your reading level and personal interests; and
- find other books, Internet sites, etc., that will allow you to explore your interests in science, history, mathematics, automobile mechanics, or wherever else your nose leads you.

As one of my own teachers said to me,

“The school is a cow—milk it!”

There may be other adults you could call on as well—a school counselor, perhaps, or a grandparent, or a neighbour. Don't be afraid to ask—most people will be happy to help.



Chapter 5

A Plan of Action

You don't need perfect habits. You don't need to cultivate each and every good habit mentioned in this book. If you try, you'll just become discouraged and give up.

Here's a better plan.

- 1. Begin by spending two or three months trying out different types of goals.** Use the Set a Goal! Form (see Appendix A). Practice setting goals, sticking to them, and getting help from parents and teachers. Find out what works for you and what doesn't. For record-keeping, use your homework diary. You may also like to use a wall calendar. If you're like me, you may prefer to use an electronic diary or calendar that will send reminders with beeps or email messages. Figure out a system that works for you.
- 2. Once you have some experience setting goals, choose one to work on for an extended time.** Look again through the good habits described in Part Two. Some habits—Practice Moral Courage, for example—don't involve regular daily or weekly behaviour, so it's hard to set a goal to improve them. Look instead at the habits that have Sample Goals in Part Two. Re-read Chapter Two, and find out where your teachers think you need to improve. Find one habit that you really want to improve, and work on it every week for three months. As you keep track of your performance each week, make sure you're making progress. If you start to slip, get help from a parent, teacher, or friend. Remember, the trick is simple repetition: repeat the desired behaviour often enough, regularly, and it will become a new habit.

The keys to success:

- **a habit you really want to improve**
- **a clearly defined goal**
- **daily repetition, with a written record**
- **support from friends, parents, or teachers**

At the end of three months, assess your progress: has your new habit become automatic, or almost automatic? Compare it with something you do daily, such as brushing your teeth before going to bed. If the answer is yes, congratulations! You have formed a new habit.

If the answer is no, or not quite, go back to your goal-setting for another month and then re-assess.

Eventually, if you keep working at it and get the help you need to stay on track, you will succeed.

If you can form three good habits in one year, you're doing very well.

Finally, if you can only manage to form two good habits—not just in a year, but in your whole life—which two should you choose? First, “Read every day”. Second, “Use a homework diary in every class, every day”. Form those two habits, and you’ll be amazed at the improvements that will follow.

Part Two

Good Habits for Good Students

6. Eleven Personal Habits

7. Nine Work Habits

8. Seven Study Habits

9. Three Essential Study Skills



Chapter 6

Eleven Personal Habits

It may seem strange to begin a book about school with a chapter on personal habits, but it's impossible to separate the *student* you are from the *person* you are.

Some personal habits—chewing with your mouth open, for example—have little direct impact on your performance in school, so I will leave those to you and your parents.

But actually, if you allow yourself to practice bad habits in any area of your life, it's more likely that you'll have bad habits in other areas, too. So if you *do* chew with your mouth open, you shouldn't.

Habits, you see, are habit-forming, and if you cultivate good ones in every area of life, you'll soon have the habit of having good habits—the ultimate good habit to have!

Practice Moral Courage

Moral courage enables you to stand up for what you believe in when others disagree. When others propose to do something they shouldn't, the person with moral courage is able to make his or her own choice, instead of going along with the crowd. When others are saying things that are rude, or hurtful, or inappropriate, the person with moral courage calls them on it. When others are mistreating someone, the person with moral courage defends him.

This is the hardest habit to acquire.

For most teenagers, nothing is more important than having friends and feeling liked by others. Practicing moral courage is difficult because it means being different and disagreeing publicly. Most people are afraid to be different, and afraid to disagree publicly, because they fear losing their friends or being disliked.

Adults often fail to practice moral courage, too. Think of all the people who listen silently as someone makes racist remarks, or all the people who do nothing about dishonest business

dealings in their companies. The world would be a better place if more people had the courage to do the right thing. For teenagers, however, because having friends and being liked is so important, moral courage is especially difficult.

Difficult as it is, practicing moral courage will often earn admiration, respect, and true friendship. After all, we have a word for people with moral courage: we call them heroes.

To me wisdom and
courage are the same
thing, for courage is
born of an
understanding of life;
he who completely
understands life is
always brave.

—Lin Yutang, Chinese
writer (1895–1976)

Moral courage is important, too, because it can save you from doing or saying stupid things that will cause you embarrassment and regret. Sometimes it can save your life, or someone else's. You may one day be urged to get into a car whose driver has been drinking. If you have been practicing moral courage in many little ways, and have developed the habit of thinking for yourself and doing the right thing, it will be easier to tell your friends that you're not getting into the car and that they shouldn't, either. If, however, you lack moral courage, you may find yourself sitting in the car wondering how you ever got yourself into such a dumb and dangerous situation.

Practice moral courage every day, in little ways, and you will see that the more you do it, the easier it gets. Every time you do or say the right thing instead of taking the easy way by going along or remaining silent, you will respect and like yourself a little bit more.

The only way to have friends is to be a good friend. The only way to be liked is to behave in ways that make you like yourself. If you don't like yourself, how can you expect others to like you?

It is curious that
physical courage should
be so common in the
world, and moral
courage so rare.

—Mark Twain,
American author
(1835-1910)

Be Honest and Reliable

The world operates on trust. If you establish a reputation for trustworthiness, lots of good things follow. For instance, on the occasion when you need a favour or need someone to give you the benefit of the doubt, you're much more likely to get what you need if you have a track record of reliability.

On the other hand, one dishonest act (cheating on a test, plagiarizing, lying) will cause people to distrust and doubt you—and it will take a long period of reliable, trustworthy behaviour to regain their confidence.

There are other benefits to honest, reliable behaviour. For starters, you like yourself better. You may be able to fool a lot of people, but you can't fool yourself. A fraud may seem reliable to friends, family, and teachers, but when he looks in the mirror he sees the truth. Do yourself a favour, and make sure that when you look in the mirror you see someone who's doing his or her honest best.

Second, dishonesty and other bad behavior actually harm you.

Many of the great stories from world literature make this point: the things you do often affect others, but they *always* affect you. To take one example, Oscar Wilde's famous character, Dorian Gray, appears to be as good as he is handsome, but secretly he does terrible things. Despite his misdeeds, he remains not just handsome but youthful over many years. However, his portrait, painted when he was young but hidden away, shows the

Exercise Your Moral Courage

You can practice moral courage in many everyday situations. Here are some examples.

- You and your friends are deciding what movie to see or where to go, but you don't like the choice they all prefer. Instead of going along silently or pretending to agree, say, "Well, it wouldn't be my first choice, but if you all like it, that's OK with me."
- One of your friends, describing something she doesn't like, says, "That's so *gay*!" Instead of letting her remark pass without comment, have the courage to point out—tactfully—that the expression she has used is actually a slur against homosexuals. "I know you didn't mean it that way, but you shouldn't use the word 'gay' to describe bad things. What if people said, 'That's so *blonde*!' to describe something stupid? Even if a blonde tried to laugh it off, it would still be hurtful."
- One of your friends has gotten a tattoo, and everyone is admiring it, but you don't like tattoos. Instead of letting everyone believe that you also think tattoos are really cool, have the courage to express a different view. "I'm glad you like his tattoo, but personally, I just don't see the appeal."

When you have survived experiences like these, you'll be much better prepared to protect yourself and do the right thing when those around you are experimenting with alcohol, drugs, or sex, or driving cars recklessly, or doing any of the other foolish and dangerous things that people in groups sometimes do.

true effects of his evil behaviour: it becomes more and more ugly, showing the monster Dorian has become. (You can read the whole story in Wilde's 1891 novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.)

If we do bad things, perhaps our worst punishment is that we become bad people. Conversely, when we do good things, we make ourselves better people. Some would say we improve our souls, while others would speak of improving our character. In the words of the American theologian Tryon Edwards (1809-1894),

Thoughts lead on to purposes; purposes go forth in action; actions form habits; habits decide character; and character fixes our destiny.

These truths have been observed by wise men and women from many cultures and religious traditions around the world and across the centuries.

One more advantage of being honest and reliable: people really do notice. I have attended many faculty meetings in which students are discussed, and listened to many staff-room conversations. I can tell you that teachers notice how students behave. When it comes down to who earns the awards, or who is appointed to positions of responsibility, or who receives positive letters of reference, those little things you do every day really count.

Treat Everyone With Respect and Courtesy

Especially when the other guy is being rude!

We fall short here for one of two reasons. Either we are careless and thoughtless, or we lose our tempers.

When we offend someone accidentally, it's often because we're trying to be funny and fail. Humour can be very tricky—what's funny to one person is sometimes insulting or offensive to another. Be careful.

At other times, we are so frustrated by what someone else is saying or doing that we forget our good manners. It's easy to be polite, courteous, and respectful when everything is going our way. The real test of good manners is whether we can continue to be polite, courteous, and respectful when the other guy is being rude, inconsiderate, and insulting. Maintaining one's poise in that situation is not easy—but try. If your commitment to respect and courtesy can't withstand the stress of an argument, a false accusation, or an insult tossed your way, it's not much of a commitment, is it?

You'll find, too, that when you do remain respectful under stress, you'll feel a lot better about yourself when the argument's over.

And when you cross the line and forget your manners, or if you offend someone unintentionally, the best response is a simple, sincere apology. That can be amazingly effective.

Take Responsibility for Your Mistakes

Apologize, fix it, and move on.

What should you say if you're caught doing something wrong? Apologize, first. Then, if you can do anything to repair the damage, do it.

All of us make mistakes. The question is, how do we respond to them? If we try to weasel out of trouble, point the finger at others, and deny responsibility, all we do is make ourselves look bad and lose the respect of those around us. All we do is show the adults involved that we are still acting like little kids. So if you get caught, don't say, "It wasn't me." Or, "Those other guys were doing it first." Or, "I didn't know."

If you make a mistake, have the courage to say, "I messed up, and I'm sorry. How can I fix it, or make up for it?" Then follow through. People are ready to forgive you—but only if you're ready to take responsibility. Apologize, fix it, and move on. That kind of response will earn admiration and respect.

I once saw two students sweeping the entranceway to their school after having been caught for a minor misdeed. One of them saw this task as a punishment, while the other saw it as doing service to the school. The first one was angry at being caught and still refused to accept responsibility for what he had done. The second had admitted his mistake, apologized, and asked what he could do to balance the

Improving your personal habits

Goal-setting works very well to improve habits that involve daily behaviour. The first four habits in this chapter—practice moral courage; always be honest and reliable; treat everyone with respect and courtesy; and take responsibility for your mistakes—concern issues that come up occasionally, at irregular times. So how can you work at them in a systematic way?

Try this: set a goal to *ask yourself a question every evening*. For example, if you want to work on treating everyone with respect, your goal would be to ask yourself, "Did I treat everyone with respect and courtesy today?" Keep a written record of whether you remember to ask each night. If the answer is ever "No", then make a point of apologizing the next day. After a few weeks of this routine, you'll find that you have become more respectful and courteous.

scales. It wasn't a big deal, but this incident spoke volumes about each of these two individuals. They were the same age, but one was still a boy, while the other was clearly a young man on the way to becoming a responsible adult.

A few words about cheating

Have you ever copied homework from a friend? Used a "cheat-sheet" during a test? Plagiarized an essay or report? Far too many students would answer "yes".

Why do students cheat?

First, because they are desperate. Bad habits have put them into a corner: their homework's not done, they aren't ready for the test, or they've put off writing the paper that's almost due.

Second, they're still thinking like little kids instead of responsible young adults. They think that if they "get away" with cheating, they will be better off. They don't realize that they are only cheating themselves. If they earn good grades for work they didn't do, they aren't learning what the work was supposed to teach them. And no matter who else believes them, they will look into the mirror and see a cheater.

What's the right thing to do if you find yourself in a corner? You already know: take responsibility. Apologize, fix it, and move on. Then when you look in the mirror, you won't see a cheater. You'll see someone who messed up but was courageous and smart enough to be honest about it.

Read Every Day

Good students are readers.

Why? First, they have a large store of background knowledge. Second, they have large vocabularies. Third, they can read quickly with excellent comprehension.

Reading is a habit that can be acquired, like any other habit. The lucky people acquire the habit of reading when they are little children. They're the ones who must be forced to put down their books to come to the dinner table; who stay up past their bedtime, reading by flashlight under their blankets; who sit in the backseat of the car with their nose in a book; and who long for summer, when they will have time to do nothing else but read.

If you are one of these people, skip the rest of this section and go on to other good habits that you may not have acquired.

If you're not yet a habitual reader, begin now. Establish a fixed time of day, and read every day—365 days a year—at that time. For most of us, this will be either when we first wake up or just before we go to sleep at night.

At first, set your timer for 15 minutes. Eliminate all possible interruptions, and read continuously for the full 15 minutes, every day. Stick to this routine until it becomes automatic, until it stops being a chore and becomes a pleasure instead. Then, increase the time to 20 minutes. When 20 minutes becomes a pleasure add five minutes, and continue this way until you are reading 30 minutes every day of the year.

Don't make the mistake of trying to read longer than 15 minutes before you really enjoy it. Even if you read slowly, stick to the 15-minute time limit.

If your reading is quite slow, then you are trying to read material that is too difficult for you right now. Think of tennis: you wouldn't try to improve your game by playing against a Wimbledon champion, nor by playing against your baby sister. Instead, you would want a tennis opponent who is just as good as you, or a little bit better. In the same way, choose reading material that is at your level, or just a little bit higher, and interesting to you. That way, you'll make maximum progress.

Nothing is
stronger than
habit.

—Ovid, Roman
poet (43 BC–17
AD)

What should you read? Everything. Read as wide a variety of books, magazines, and newspapers as possible. Newspapers and news magazines will teach you not only about current events, but also about history, geography, politics, society, and culture.

Read stories, poems, novels, plays; history (biographies are a wonderful introduction to history); geography; natural science; legends and myths from many cultures; and later on, politics and philosophy.

To gain a basic understanding of Western culture, you should be familiar with Greco-Roman mythology and the Bible—not as religious texts but as the major sources of Western stories, expressions, and cultural assumptions. Students who know from childhood about Helen of Troy and the labours of Hercules, who know about the Garden of Eden, Moses, and the parables of Jesus, will have a great advantage over their classmates who must begin learning these stories and many more at age 14 or 15.

Everything connects with everything else, and the more you read, the more you will see those connections. If you keep it up, you will eventually have the right to call yourself an educated person.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To read for 15 minutes every day.
Action required	Establish a fixed time and place to read. Eliminate all possible interruptions, and set a timer for 15 minutes.
How often?	Every day.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary, and also on your wall calendar if you wish.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you read every day for 15 full minutes, give yourself a treat.
Revision	If you fell short, repeat for another week. When you read for seven straight days, give yourself that treat. Then continue, with a treat at the end of each successful week, until the reading itself is a treat. At that point—not before—increase the time to 20 minutes.

Arrive on Time

It's a matter of respect.

In some schools, arriving late to class is viewed seriously, with strict rules, late slips, detentions, and other penalties for those who are tardy too often. In other schools, these issues don't seem so important. Most students attend 6–8 classes each day, along with occasional assemblies, meetings, rehearsals, and practices. It's a busy life, but it's also often repetitive. If your school doesn't stress the importance of arriving on time, it's easy to slip into the bad habit of thinking it's not really important.

However, in the real world, arriving on time can be very important. Some cultures value punctuality more than others, but in those cultures where it's important, arriving late can be a serious problem. What's the big deal about arriving late? It's a sign of disrespect. A student who arrives late to class is sending a message to the teacher: "You and your class are not very important to me, and making you and the rest of the class wait for me or disrupting the class by entering late is really not a problem, because you and my classmates are much less important than I am."

Later in life you'll be happy to have the habit of arriving on time when you have to get to work each day, attend business meetings, make appointments with doctors, lawyers, and bank officers, etc. Arriving on time for dates can be important, too. In each case, by arriving on time you send the message that you respect others and appreciate the value of their time and attention.

If you are in the habit of arriving late, start arriving on time today.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To arrive on time for every Science class (pick a class for which you're often late).
Action required	Remember! Give yourself an extra five minutes, just to be sure.
How often?	Every class meeting.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary, and also on your wall calendar if you wish.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you are always on time, bravo!
Revision	If you still arrive late sometimes, repeat for another week. When you are able to arrive on time for this one class, add another, then another, until you consistently arrive on time to all your classes.

Have a Question? *Ask Your Teacher!*

Good students ask questions.

Are you shy? Find a way to ask questions. Sometimes after class or after school is best. Sometimes a note to the teacher works well. Learn to tell when it's the wrong moment to ask a question, and ask it later. But never leave a question unasked!

Many students are reluctant to ask questions. Sometimes the reasons are personal, but often it's about what other students might think of you if you ask a question. This takes us back to moral courage. Be brave enough to ask questions, and brave enough not to care if some people put you down for it. Many others will respect you, and in the long run you'll be better off.

Occasionally, a student will ask too many questions, or ask questions at the wrong time. If you're not sure when or how to ask questions in class, find a classmate who earns good grades, and watch the way he or she asks questions.

The questions your teachers ask are often good models for you to imitate and learn from. Some questions are about the literal or factual meaning; some involve interpreting or reading between the lines; and others involve making judgments. A good student understands these different kinds of questions and knows when to ask each kind. Asking questions is a skill, perhaps even an art, that takes practice and experience to master.

Strange as it may seem, the most important questions are not those you ask the teacher: they are the ones you ask yourself as you think about the subject you're studying. Good students, even when they aren't asking questions out loud, are asking themselves questions and making notes about them. This is what is meant by "active" learning: the student's mind is actively searching for answers, not passively waiting for them. And since all learning is active, if you're not active, you're not learning.

In some cultures, students rarely if ever ask questions in class. If you come from such a culture and are now going to school outside your home country, you'll have to decide whether you want to try to change your own habits in this area. When it comes to the questions you ask yourself, however, you should definitely be an active learner who is constantly questioning what you are hearing and reading in class.

So start asking questions!

Set a Goal!

Goal	To ask at least one question in every lesson.
Action required	Ask a question in each class. (“May I go to the bathroom?” doesn’t count.) The questions must have something to do with schoolwork.
How often?	In every lesson.
Start date	
Monitoring	In your homework diary, keep a tally class-by-class.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you asked at least one question in 90 percent of your lessons, you’re doing an excellent job.
Revision	If you asked at least one question in less than 50 percent of your classes, reduce your goal to three questions per day and try again.

Have a Problem? *Tell Your Teacher!*

Not every teacher will be sympathetic every time. But most will listen sympathetically if you speak with them—in *advance*, or *as soon as you know*—and explain the situation. Students who communicate with their teachers usually get the benefit of the doubt. If you have trouble talking with a particular teacher, find another teacher or school administrator who will listen, and ask for his or her assistance.

In most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster, and will never soften again . . . We must make automatic and habitual, as early as possible, as many useful actions as we can, and guard against the growing into ways that are likely to be disadvantageous to us.

—William James,
American psychologist
and philosopher (1842-
1910)

Teachers are not mind readers. It may be obvious to *you* that you have a problem, but your teachers may have no idea. Let them know. If it’s something personal, you don’t have to go into great detail. “Mrs. Johnson, I’m sorry if I’m not my usual self today, but I’m having some personal problems, and I’m kind of upset.” Most teachers will be sympathetic, and quite willing to offer special accommodations, if you need them. Students who have been reliable and honest in the past will almost certainly receive sympathetic treatment in such circumstances. (Those who have not been reliable may have more trouble earning their teachers’ trust—another good reason to develop the habit of being reliable!)

Having trouble with homework? The same rule applies. Let’s say the assignment is due, but yours isn’t ready to hand in. What do you say when the teacher asks for your homework? If all you say is, “I don’t have it”, what is the teacher supposed to think? Unfortunately, teachers will often assume the worst: that you were lazy, or disorganized, or inattentive—and maybe even that you don’t really care about the class, or about school in general.

If you're reading this book, then you *do* care about school and want to do well. So how do you let the teacher know?

You probably don't want to have a conversation with the teacher during class. First, it will take up valuable class time. Second, it will probably be overheard by your classmates, and that might be a bit embarrassing—or very embarrassing.

A better approach: if you don't have a good excuse for not completing the homework, write a note of apology and give it to the teacher at the start of class, or earlier in the school day if you can. (Apologize, fix it, and move on.) If you usually hand your work in on time, your good track record will encourage the teacher to go easy on you. Then finish that homework, and hand it in!

If you do have a legitimate reason for not completing the homework on time, write a brief note explaining the circumstances, letting the teacher know when you will be able to hand in the work and asking if that is okay.

Finally, if you know in advance that you won't be able to complete the assignment on time because of some unusual situation, speak with the teacher in advance, explain the problem, and ask if you could have a time extension. If you're going to have the same problem in several classes, speak with your homeroom teacher or advisor and ask him or her for help in informing your teachers.

If you're honest, reliable, and responsible about communicating openly and courteously, you will have few problems with your teachers. Occasionally you'll meet one who's just mean. In that case be as polite as you can and walk the other way whenever possible.

Drink Lots of Water

The brain—and the rest of the body—needs plenty of water to work at its peak levels.

Recent research by scientists studying the brain tells us what our grandmothers have always known: the body needs plenty of water to stay in good working order. When you study at home, have a pitcher of water at hand. At school, ask permission to have a bottle of water at your desk. The rule of thumb is that we should drink 6–8 glasses a day (about 48–64 oz., or somewhere between 1½ and 2 litres).

Soda pop is *not* an approved substitutes for water. The sugar content in these drinks puts you on a roller-coaster of sugar highs and lows, and it does nothing to help your body—including your brain—work better. Fruit juice? Energy drinks? No. Stick with water.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To drink 48 oz. or 1½ litres of water every day.
Action required	Buy a 16-oz. or 50-ml. plastic water bottle. Carry it with you, and drink water often enough to fill and empty it three times by the end of each day.
How often?	Daily.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a tally of every time you refill the bottle in your homework diary.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you drank your full quota of water every day, congratulations!
Revision	If you had trouble drinking a full 48 oz. or 1½ litres every day, repeat for another week until you succeed.

Exercise Regularly

Your brain—stay with me here—is part of your body.

If you participate in school sports, then you're getting plenty of exercise (during the season, at least). But are you developing exercise routines that you can continue into your adult years?

Most P.E. teachers are athletes, and their interests naturally center on students who are athletes. P.E. classes and after-school programs tend to focus on team sports. For those who enjoy other activities, such as rock climbing, or for non-athletes who simply want to stay physically fit, many schools offer little support.

Most of us *don't* participate in team sports, however, and even those who play on high school teams often drop out of team sports in their university years. By the time we are in our early twenties, very few of us play team sports. What we need is a way to stay physically fit while also working full-time, commuting, shopping and running errands, and raising families. Sadly, we rarely develop the habit of exercising regularly when we are young, and by our mid-thirties we find ourselves flabby and out of shape.

If you're lucky enough to attend a school that offers yoga, aerobic dance, martial arts, Pilates, and other forms of personal-fitness programs, go right now and thank whoever is responsible.

If you're on your own, like most of us, start learning about how you like to exercise. If you don't enjoy your exercise routine, it will be very difficult to maintain it.

Perhaps the first question to ask is, "Do you like to work out at home by yourself, or do you prefer to go to a gym and exercise with others, or at least in their company?" Your answer will lead to two sets of different options.

Seek out help wherever you can find it. Ask adults how they stay fit. Check out the offerings of your local recreation center or private gymnasiums. Look for instructional videos.

Try out various forms of exercise to see which ones appeal to you. Many adults swim, which they can do alone. Others play squash or racketball or tennis, for which they need a partner. You may know an adult who plays squash, for example, and would be happy to gain an new partner by teaching you how to play.

A few *do* continue to play team sports as adults. If you're inclined in that direction, find out what possibilities exist in your area. Be careful, though: what exercise will you do in the off-season, or if you move to a place where your favourite team sport is not available? You would be wise to supplement your participation in team sports with a personal exercise regimen that you can do anywhere, year-round.

Experiment, too, with your daily and weekly schedule. Do you prefer to work out in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the evening? How can you fit in three workouts a week?

Finally, you may be able to exercise quite a lot simply by walking or cycling from place to place instead of going by car or bus. I cycle to work, which gives me over an hour of exercise five days a week. Some of my colleagues jog home after school two or three days a week.

It may seem daunting to work through all these questions now, but believe me, it will be much more difficult in ten years. Start now and you'll have a much better chance of staying fit your whole life.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To exercise three times every week.
Action required	Exercise for at least 20 minutes on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. (Change these days, if necessary, to ones more convenient for you.)
How often?	Three times a week.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a record in your homework diary or on your wall calendar. (Note: You don't have to exercise the same way each day!)
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you exercised every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday, congratulations! If not, repeat as needed until regular exercise becomes a well-established habit.
Revision	Your success depends on consistency over a long period of time. For that reason, I suggest that you continue repeating this goal, along with other goals you may be working on, for at least six months.

Eat Properly, Get Enough Sleep, and Stay Drug-Free

Your brain—have I mentioned this already?—is part of your body.

You can't expect your brain to do its best unless you take care of it. Junk food, irregular meals, inadequate sleep, cigarettes, alcohol, caffeine, "recreational" drugs—all of these diminish your brain's ability to work. All of them, too, are entirely avoidable—bad habits people slip into because they take the easy way, the lazy way. Be smarter than that.

And if you've already developed, or begun to develop, a bad habit in this area, break it *now*!

Skipping breakfast is a common error in today's society. I've made this the topic of my sample goal. If you aren't sure what a "proper breakfast" is, now is a great time to learn a bit about nutrition. Your parents and teachers may be able to help you with this (see Chapter 4: Getting Help from Parents and Teachers).

Set a Goal!

Goal	To eat a proper breakfast every morning.
Action required	Eat breakfast!
How often?	Daily.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a record in your homework diary or on your wall calendar.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you ate a proper breakfast every day, congratulations! If not, repeat as needed until eating breakfast becomes a well-established habit.
Revision	If you already have bad habits in this area, begin by aiming to eat a proper breakfast at least three times a week, and then increase your goal gradually to seven times a week.

Chapter 7

Nine Work Habits

Do you use a homework diary? Do you make good use of your time in class? Do you complete all your assignments and hand them in on time? Do you get started on your homework right away, or do you procrastinate (put it off until later)? Do you arrive for classes with all the books and materials you need? Are you conscientious about making up work you've missed because of absences?

These questions all involve the work habits you practice in school, and many of them carry over into the workplace once you are out of school. Develop good work habits now, and they will serve you well for the rest of your life.

Use a Homework Diary in Every Class, Every Day

Whether you call it a student agenda, a day planner, or a homework diary, it's the most important tool of a successful student.

Bad habits are like a comfortable bed, easy to get into but hard to get out of.

—Anonymous

You need a homework diary to stay organized, and you need a homework diary for successful goal-setting. I have yet to find a disorganized student who uses his or her diary regularly. I have yet to find a failed attempt at goal-setting in which a daily record was kept in a homework diary.

So why do so many students ignore this vital tool? Because teachers rarely require the use of a homework diary. They may encourage it, they may nag or remind, but few require it, and even when they do, most of their colleagues don't. So, at best, students will be required to use their diaries in one or two of their five or six classes each day. As readers of this book should know, habits are created by repetition, and under such circumstances the repeated behaviour is to ignore the homework diary—exactly the habit that most students cultivate.

If you want to do something to improve education in your school, lend this book to your principal or head of school, and convince him or her to require the use of homework diaries by every teacher in every class (even gym teachers sometimes assign homework or give out information that needs to be diaried).

As with so many other good habits, using a homework diary becomes more important every year. You may be able to do fine without one in the younger grades, but don't let this fool you into developing bad habits that will hurt you later on. Don't wait until you're overwhelmed with a busy schedule and heavy workload. Cultivate the habit when you're younger and life is simpler.

If you're on your own, enlist the help of your parents and make daily use of your homework diary your first goal. Use a wall calendar at home to record the number of classes each day in which you use your diary. A simple "5/7" (5 out of 7) or "4/5" will do. Ask your parents to remind you to take your diary to school each day, and take it to every class. When you arrive in class, take out your diary and put it on your desktop, first thing. If you do this in every class, it will become a powerful habit. And if the diary is on your desktop, of course, it's quite easy to remember to open it up and record the homework assignment.

A final tip: If the teacher assigns no homework, don't just leave your diary blank. A blank entry could mean no homework, or it could mean you forgot to write the assignment in your diary. Instead, write something like "Science: No HW". That way, there's no confusion.

Using a homework diary in every class is the key to staying organized, and the key to successful goal-setting. Start today!

Set a Goal!

Goal	To use a homework diary—paper or electronic—in every class.
Action required	Bring your diary to school every day. Take it to every class in which homework is assigned. When you first arrive in class, put your diary on your desktop. Record the homework for each class. If there is no homework that day, write something like "Science: No HW".
How often?	Every class.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use a wall calendar at home to record your success rate every evening.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	Anything less than 90 percent success is unsatisfactory.
Revision	Repeat as needed until you have established a firm habit of using your homework diary. For more rapid success, work on this goal with a classmate. When one forgets, the other may remember.

Use Class Time Productively

Don't waste your class time or—even worse—distract others who are trying to learn. The test: you should be able to identify at least one thing you have learned during each class, and one question you have about the lesson.

School quickly becomes routine, and it's easy to lose focus if nothing very interesting seems to be going on. Ideally, your lessons should be interesting and your teachers inspiring, which would make it easy for you and your classmates to concentrate. But that isn't always the case. It's also true, of course, that sometimes schoolwork is *work*. We all have a tendency toward laziness, so even if the work is important and useful, we often try to avoid it.

What to do?

There are no tricks here. What's required is simple willpower and self-discipline. If you force yourself to remain focused and attentive in every class, you will slowly acquire the habit of remaining focused and attentive. Once it's a habit, it will be more or less automatic and effortless.

When the class is less than fascinating, force yourself to stay focused. Try to find a question that needs answering. Try to discover the value and purpose of the work you're doing. If all else fails, remember that the most important goal of your school experience is to develop good habits. Focusing your attention in an uninspiring lesson may seem about as interesting as doing push-ups. But it may turn out, like those push-ups, to be excellent exercise.

Another point: many students will listen pretty well when the *teacher* is talking, but very few listen to their classmates. To talk or tune out when a classmate speaks is bad manners, of course, but it also deprives you of enormous benefits.

"But how can I benefit," you may ask, "from listening to other students who don't know what they're talking about?" You benefit by learning from their mistakes and by trying to understand what chain of reasoning has led them to those mistakes. That's a great deal of learning—but most students pass it right by when they tune out their peers. Be one of the smart ones, and listen—*really* listen—to your classmates.

One more tip. If you finish the work you've been assigned in class, ask the teacher what you should do next. If she then says you can relax for the remaining minutes of the lesson, you can do so without getting into trouble—which you might, if you don't ask first.

If using class time productively is a challenge for you, try using the Learning Log (see Appendix A) and the sample goal below.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To stay on task in English class. (Substitute the class where you need most to improve your concentration.)
Action required	Complete one section of the Learning Log for every English lesson.
How often?	Each English lesson.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use the Learning Log (see Appendix A).
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	(1) If you succeeded in recording something you learned, a question you had, and something you wanted to learn more about—for every English lesson during the week—congratulations! If not, repeat as needed until concentrating in class becomes a well-established habit. (2) Ask your teacher if he or she noticed any improvement in your performance in class during the week. If you have trouble identifying something you learned, a question, and something you would like to learn more about, enlist the help of your teacher or your parents. They may be able to suggest some ideas that will help you complete these items.
Revision	Repeat as needed, one class at a time. Even though you don't complete the Learning Log for every class, try to pay attention in each class as if you were filling out the Learning Log there, too. Remember that habits are created by repetition. Repeat often enough, for long enough, and <i>voila!</i> you've created a habit.

Complete All Your Assignments

Even if the work is late, complete it and hand it in. Even if the work will receive no credit, complete it and hand it in. Take the attitude that failing to hand in an assignment is simply not an option. (It certainly won't be an option when you have a job and your boss gives you a deadline!)

The best way to lower your grades? Don't hand in your work.

Students who don't hand in their work are discouraged. Sometimes, they have given up entirely. They are convinced that they won't do well, that they can't do well, and so they have decided to stop trying.

It's terrible to see someone lose hope and give up. What's worse is that these students have given up because they believe a lie: they believe they can't learn.

We all learn at different speeds and in different ways, but we all can learn. Don't ever let anyone—including yourself—tell you that you can't.

Woody Guthrie (1912–1967), the great American folksinger, songwriter, and author, grew up in poverty in Oklahoma. He spent a good deal of time traveling with migrant workers who had been driven from their homes by the Great Depression and the long, terrible drought that struck the western plains of the United States during the 1930s. Here's what Guthrie had to say about believing in yourself:

I hate a song that makes you think that you are not any good. I hate a song that makes you think that you are just born to lose. Bound to lose. No good to nobody. No good for nothing. Because you are too old or too young or too fat or too slim or too ugly or too this or too that. Songs that run you down or poke fun at you on account of your bad luck or hard traveling.

*I am out to fight those songs to my very last breath of air and my last drop of blood. I am out to sing songs that will prove to you that this is your world and that if it has hit you pretty hard and knocked you for a dozen loops, no matter what color, what size you are, how you are built, I am out to sing the songs that make you take pride in yourself and in your work.**

Woody Guthrie understood the importance of having faith in yourself. He also understood that the best way to believe in yourself is to reach out to others who are worse off than you are.

*Excerpt from WNEW by Woody Guthrie
© Copyright 1965 (renewed) by WOODY GUTHRIE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
All rights reserved. Used by permission.

If you don't complete all your assignments, decide that, beginning today, you will. If you have to hand in part of it on the due date and the rest later, do that. If you have to hand in the whole thing later, do that. If the teacher says, "It's too late. I won't even mark it", hand it in anyway and ask the teacher if he or she would be kind enough to look it over and tell you what grade you would have received if it had been turned in on time. If the teacher says, "No, you missed your chance", that's okay. The important thing is that you establish two iron-clad rules:

I will complete every assignment!

I will never give up!

Set a Goal!

Goal	To complete all assignments.
Action required	Complete every assignment!
How often?	Every assignment.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use the Homework Tracker (see Appendix A) to record each assignment, its due date, and the date you actually complete it.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you completed every assignment, bravo! If you failed to complete one or more assignments, you need to work harder at establishing this good habit.
Revision	For some goals, an 80 percent or 90 percent success rate is very good. In this case, however, anything less than 100 percent is unacceptable. So if you fell short during your first attempt, try again. Ask your parents to help by giving you reminders, checking your Homework Tracker, etc. If you have very bad habits in this area, ask your teachers to use the Daily Check Sheet (see Appendix A) to help you keep on track.

File Your Papers Where You Can Find Them

Through all my years of high school, university, and graduate studies, no one ever said a single word to me about filing my papers. I really wish someone had!

As it turns out, filing can be a key to happiness and success—or, if you don’t know how to do it, the source of more misery than you would ever believe. The trick is to start teaching yourself how to file *before* you have a lot of stuff to file. (If you think you have a lot now . . . well, you’ll find out.)

If your papers are often in a mess, here’s my advice. Use a three-ring binder, with dividers for each subject. Next, add sub dividers within each subject. One section should be for information that applies to the entire course. Other sections should be for separate units of study. In English, there might be a section for a novel. In Science, you might have a section for the unit on cells. In History, you might have a section for the French Revolution. You get the idea.

Buy a box of those plastic sleeves that you can slip a full-sized sheet of paper into, and put all your papers—handouts, notes, returned tests, etc.—into sleeves. Then put the plastic sleeves into the binder. Even if your papers are already hole-punched, the sleeves will make it easier to keep them clean, organized, and easy to find. Keep a supply of empty sleeves and extra dividers at the back of your binder.

If you’re wondering when you’ll ever do all this filing, think about those little chunks of time in class when you really aren’t busy: waiting for the lesson to start, or waiting while the

teacher is setting up the DVD player, or waiting for others to finish the test, or chatting with friends during the last few minutes before the bell rings. Use those times to file, and you'll find that you hardly need to spend any time on it outside class.

If your binder fills up before the end of the year, you can create a second "Archive" binder for storing the papers you don't need to have with you every day in school. For example, if you study the French Revolution in September and write an end-of-term exam in December, you can put all of your French Revolution papers in the Archive binder in January with the other first-term materials. There's no need to carry them around each day, but if you need to review them for the final exam in June, you know right where to find them.

Some people prefer to have separate binders for each subject rather than carry one fat binder with them. But then they have to remember to take the right binder to each class. Either way, use those plastic sleeves and a good supply of dividers, and you will be so happy that you can find what you're looking for in an instant. Later on, when you have to keep one whole set of documents organized at work and another pile of bills and correspondence organized at home, you will be even happier that you took the time to learn how to file your papers.

Do Homework as Soon as It's Assigned—Not the Day Before It's Due!

Most of us are naturally inclined to put off doing work. Train yourself out of this, and you will be a much happier person all your life.

Every habit is difficult at the beginning. Think of learning to play the piano. At first, your finger muscles aren't trained; you have to look at each note, double-check to see which key it represents, think again to be sure, and then finally hit the key. A few weeks later, you look at a note and automatically hit the right key with the right finger.

If you're in the habit of postponing homework until the last possible moment, changing will be difficult at first. But if you're determined to improve your habits, you'll be willing to force yourself through that difficult period of effort at the beginning. Your reward will be the happiness of finishing your work efficiently, without allowing it to pile up.

Try using the Homework Tracker (see Appendix A) to help you work on this habit.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To complete homework as soon as it's assigned.
Action required	Use the Homework Tracker (see Appendix A). Do all homework for one subject the day it's assigned. If the homework will take more than one day to complete, <i>start</i> working on it the day it's assigned.
How often?	Each homework assignment for English (or choose one of your other classes.)
Start date	
Monitoring	Complete one section of the Homework Tracker for every English lesson.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	Some homework assignments can't be done right away, but you can at least start on most of them and should be able to complete many of them. To measure your success, first put aside any assignments that were impossible to complete immediately. For the remaining ones, if you did 80 percent or more of them the day they were assigned, you are doing an excellent job in this area.
Revision	Repeat as needed, one class at a time. As you improve, add more subjects until you are doing all of your homework right away, instead of putting it off.

Hand in Work on Time

First, be organized about writing down assignments and due dates, and keeping up with them. Use a homework diary! Second, don't procrastinate. Third, if you encounter a problem that may cause your work to be late, talk to the teacher *before* the assignment is due.

Years ago, I took a job as a summer camp counselor. Before the campers arrived, the counselors had a few days to prepare. On our first day, we sat in a big circle on the lawn in front of the main building. There were about 50 of us. Two-thirds of us were there for the first time. The director, a woman who was almost 70 years old, went around the circle, without notes, and introduced each one of us to the others. She already knew our names, our hometowns, and where we were going to school.

She finished introducing all 50 of us. "Now", she said, "I was able remember all your names and faces, and a little bit about where you're from and what you're doing. Each of you will be responsible for around a dozen campers. We have a folder for each camper, with their photos, and I expect you to study those folders carefully. When your campers get off the bus on Wednesday you will greet each one of them by name."

Until then, I had convinced myself that I was no good at remembering people's names. My camp director convinced me otherwise. I learned that remembering names was a simple matter of desire, determination, and effort. We can all do it, if we really want to.

Being on time with homework assignments is also a simple matter of desire, determination, and effort. If you think it is really important—and it is—you will make the effort that's required.

The thought manifests as the word; the word manifests as the deed; the deed develops into habit; and habit hardens into character.

—The Buddha,
Siddhartha Gautama
(623–543 BC)

If you hand in work late (more than very occasionally), you are in effect telling teachers that you don't really care—*not* the message you want to send!

If you have bad habits in this area, finishing work on time will at first require real concentration. As you continue, however, working on time will become habitual, an almost automatic reflex, and the effort required will decrease considerably.

Use a homework diary. Get help from your teachers, your advisor or homeroom teacher, your friends, and your parents. Use the Homework Tracker (see Appendix A). Do everything you can to develop this crucially important habit.

Set a Goal!

Goal	To complete all assignments on time.
Action required	Complete every assignment on time!
How often?	Every assignment.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use the Homework Tracker to record every assignment, its due date, and the date you actually complete it.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you turned in at least 95 percent of your assignments on time, congratulations! If you didn't reach this level, you need to improve. (Note: If you have a legitimate reason for handing an assignment in late, you can count it as being "on time".)
Revision	If you have a bad habit of handing in work late, repeat this goal-setting exercise. Ask your parents to help by giving you reminders and checking your Homework Tracker. If you have very bad habits in this area, ask your teachers to use the Daily Check Sheet (see Appendix A) to help you keep on track.

Come to Class Prepared

Books, binders, pencil case, etc. Have everything you need with you when you arrive.

People sometimes advise us not to worry about the little things. But often it's little things that cause the biggest annoyance. Example: students having to go back to their lockers after class has started because they've forgotten to bring the right book, binder, or other materials they need. Valuable class time is wasted, since the teacher must usually wait until everyone is present to begin the activity.

For most of us, bringing the right materials is simply a matter of caring enough to think about it before we head off to class. If you, like most students, have six or seven classes a day, five days a week, there will almost inevitably be a time here and there when you forget to bring the right materials. But if it happens more than very occasionally, you need to improve in this area.

First, **pack your schoolbag at night, not in the morning**. When you finish your homework, check your homework diary to see what you will be doing the next day, and make sure everything you have is in the bag. In the morning you won't have to think about what you need—just pick up the bag and go.

Once you're at school, try simply paying attention to this issue. Before you go to class, take 15 seconds to think hard about what you did in the previous lesson, what the homework assignment was, and what the teacher said you needed to bring next time. Do this for just one of your classes, or for all of them, for a solid week. If you improve, then you can probably continue improving simply by making this 15-second pause into a habit.

If you still have difficulties, however, you will need to take a more structured approach. Every evening, make a note in your homework diary for each class you will have the next day, listing all the items you need to bring to class (apart from the ones you always carry with you). Then, during your 15-second pause, don't just think—look in your diary and check the list for the next class. If you adopt this method, there is just one item you must remember to bring without writing it down: your homework diary!

Set a Goal!

Goal	To arrive for classes with all needed materials.
Action required	Take 15 seconds before heading off to each class to think about what you need to bring.
How often?	Every class.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use your homework diary to record your success or failure for each class.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you were prepared for class 90 percent of the time or better, congratulations!
Revision	If you need to improve, repeat this goal-setting exercise until your success consistently reaches 95 percent or better. If you have bad habits in this area, spend five minutes each evening making a list in your homework diary of needed materials for each of the next day's classes.

Keep a Copy of Major Assignments

Don't rely on electronic copies. Make a paper copy, just in case. Accidents happen, but by keeping a copy you can prevent an accident from becoming a disaster.

It isn't necessary—or practical—to make a copy of every homework assignment before you hand it in. You should, however, make a paper copy of major assignments such as book reports, essays, projects (if they're in written form), and term papers.

If you work on a computer, you may be tempted to rely on the electronic copy. Don't! Diskettes and CDs get lost, hard drives become corrupted, and electronic data can easily be lost.

Keeping a paper copy is like buying insurance; most of the time, it isn't needed. But if a house burns down or a car is stolen, the owners will be quite happy they had insurance. And if a teacher loses a paper that you have handed in, you will be *very* happy to be able to replace it quickly and easily with the copy you made.

And when you are in university, where the entire grade for a course is sometimes based on one paper plus an exam, you will be happy to have acquired the firm habit of keeping a paper copy of every major assignment.

Be Responsible About Making Up Work When You Have Been Absent

Ask your teachers—not your friends—about what you have missed.

Students often make a major error with regard to making up work: they think it's the teacher's job to inform them, not their job to ask. Other students do ask, but they ask their friends—and far too often that information is incomplete or incorrect.

Being responsible means . . .

- You know what each teacher's policies are, before you miss any work.
- During your absence, if possible, you communicate with teachers about the work that is being assigned.
- If an absence is foreseeable—a sports trip, for example—you speak with your teachers *before* your departure.
- In the case of longer absences, you discuss with each teacher a schedule for making up all the work you have missed.

The student who disappears without explanation, who makes no attempt to ask about missed work, or who—worst of all—simply fails to hand in the missing work, sends all the wrong messages to his or her teachers. On the other hand, by being responsible you show teachers that you do care, and that you are prepared to look after your own affairs without being nagged or chased.



Chapter 8

Seven Study Habits

Do you have a regular place to study, somewhere you can concentrate, with all the materials you need at hand? Do you review daily? (I didn't think so.) Do you take regular study breaks? How do you manage projects and other long-term assignments? Do you know how to behave in a formal examination? These are what I mean by study *habits*.

Study *skills* are a bit different. Three of them are so important that I include them in the next chapter.

Find a Place and Time for Studying That Works for You

We are all different, so you have to find the time, place, space, and conditions for studying that work best for you.

The basic question to ask is, are you being productive? If not, make changes.

If the telephone is interrupting you, turn it off or move away from it. If the TV or other people are distracting you, move away from them.

Are you comfortable? Are all the materials you need within reach? If you need to write, do you have a table to write on or a computer to use?

There are no hard-and-fast rules here. Not everyone will do best sitting at the kitchen table, or at a desk, or in an easy chair. For some, the best idea is to go to the local library and work there, away from interruptions and distractions. Others may prefer a table in the food court of the local mall, where they can eat and drink while they work. Just because a certain arrangement is best for somebody else doesn't mean it will work for you, too.

Again, there is only one important question: are you being productive? If not, make changes.

Review Your Classes Every Day

Take five minutes to review every lesson you've had each day. Put your notes in order, jot down any questions you have about the lesson, etc. This will really pay off.

Remember that fable about the ant and the grasshopper? The ant spends the warm months collecting food for the winter and preparing his lodgings while the grasshopper eats when he's hungry and plays the rest of the time. When winter comes the ant is warm and snug, with a good supply of food, but the grasshopper is freezing and starving.

Fables are not really about animals or insects, of course. They're about you and me.

You probably know students—you may be one of them—who do little studying until the days just before a test. The night before the test, these students may stay up late cramming. Sometimes, they do fine. As you move up from grade to grade, however, the tests get harder, and the amount of material they cover grows. It becomes very difficult to wait until the last minute, cram, and still do well. When you reach the big examinations at the end of Grade 12, it's impossible.

If you still have the habit of cramming for tests in Grade 12, it will be very hard to break it and replace it with better habits. The time to form good study habits is now, when tests aren't so difficult—or so important to your future—as they will be later on.

The hell to be endured hereafter, of which theology tells, is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world by habitually fashioning our characters in the wrong way. Could the young but realize how soon they will become mere walking bundles of habits, they would give more heed to their conduct.

—William James, American psychologist and philosopher (1842-1910)

The habit of reviewing every day for five minutes is easy to practice. Once you have established it as a routine, you'll find that cramming for tests has become unnecessary. Here's how you do it.

Let's say you have four academic classes on Wednesday. On Wednesday night, you start your homework session with four five-minute review sessions. For each class, you have your textbook, your notes, and any handouts from the teacher. Using your notes, think back over that day's lesson. What topics were covered? What were you supposed to learn? Did you understand everything? Do you have any questions about the day's lesson? Write down any questions you have in a section of your notes, clearly labeled with the date and the topic. If any of the five minutes remains, go through your notes, handouts, or textbook and search for the answers to your questions. *Any questions not cleared up during the review or the homework should be asked in class during the next lesson.*

Do this for each of the classes you had that day, whether or not you have homework in those subjects. When you've finished, or every 20 to 30 minutes, take a five-minute break to stretch, walk around, have a snack, etc. Just be sure the break is no longer than five minutes. Then go back to work, this time doing whatever homework assignments you have.

Five-minute reviews have several purposes:

- **They help you to store in long-term memory what you have learned in class each day.** Scientists studying how the brain works have established that without regular reviews like this, whatever you have “learned” never moves from short-term memory into long-term memory, and before long it disappears! Then when test time approaches, the memory bank is empty, and you're back to cramming. If you review regularly, you store the important ideas and information in your long-term memory, where they will remain safe and secure until you need them—on a test, for example.
- **They help you to identify the questions you have.** Just a few minutes' review will bring to mind questions you would otherwise forget about. Good students ask questions, and the key to getting the right answers is asking the right questions. The more you think of questions and ask them, the more you will learn.
- **They help prepare you to do any homework assignments that are based on that day's lesson.** Homework often aims to review and reinforce material that has been introduced in class. At other times, homework is designed to introduce a new topic. Since one lesson often leads to the next one, the best preparation for doing homework is to review what you did in class that day.

The mini review

Here's an even quicker way to review. Every afternoon or evening, answer three questions, in writing, about each class you had that day:

1. What is one thing you learned in the lesson?
2. What is one question you have about the lesson?
3. What is one thing covered in the lesson that you'd like to know more about?

If you can answer these questions, you were certainly paying attention in class and thinking about the lesson! Next day in class, ask the questions you still have about each lesson. If you like this approach use the Learning Log (see Appendix A).

No study technique or work habit is more important to your success in school than daily review. It's quick, it's easy, and it makes homework and tests easier, too!

Set a Goal!

Goal	To review each of your classes for five minutes.
Action required	Take five minutes to remember what happened in class, look over any notes you took, read through any handouts you were given, etc.
How often?	Every day
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you reviewed all your classes at least four days out of five, that's pretty good.
Revision	Repeat until nightly review of all your classes becomes automatic.

Take Study Breaks to Help You Stay Alert

The brain can only absorb so much at a time. Use a five-minute break every 20 to 30 minutes to stand up, get the blood circulating, or have a snack and a glass of water.

This is another idea long favoured by people based on their own experience, and now supported by brain research.

Many people used to think that our “attention span” increases as we get older, and it was common for those making this argument to point out that university students could sit through long lectures—sometimes lasting two or three hours—that younger students could never tolerate.

Recent research suggests, however, that even university students have a short attention span, and those long lectures were probably not very productive for most people who sat through them. Instead, it makes sense to take a break every 20 to 30 minutes. Teachers in high school and middle school who are aware of this research make a point of switching activities or building reinforcement activities into their lessons every 10 to 20 minutes. These pauses keep students active and attentive, and they help reinforce the material being taught so that it moves from short-term memory (where it will quickly disappear) into long-term memory (where it will stay put).

Use this knowledge to make homework and study sessions more productive. If you tend to extend breaks beyond five minutes, use a kitchen timer to remind you it's time to get back to work. In class, if your teacher doesn't include breaks or change activities, take a few moments on your own to stretch, breathe deeply, or even just switch positions in your chair. If you can stand briefly or walk a bit, do that, too.

Use a Planning Calendar for Projects

Scheduling each step of a project will not only make the project easier; it will also give you valuable practice planning your time in a detailed way.

Unless you're training to be an Olympic athlete, your schedule is probably not full enough or complicated enough to need detailed planning. But when you're older—starting a career, working full time, and perhaps raising a family—you may benefit from knowing how to plan your schedule and even out your workload. Even in Grades 11 and 12, if you're involved in a demanding course of study such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP) programs, or if you are involved in various extracurricular activities, working part-time, etc., planning skills can be very useful.

There's little point in trying to plan every school task in a detailed way. When you are assigned a major project, however, or one that is to be completed over several weeks or months, you have the opportunity to improve your performance on it and gain valuable experience by using a planning calendar.

Many teachers who assign a project will break it down into sections with separate due-dates. The teacher may give due-dates, for example, for choosing a topic, completing an outline, and completing a first draft. Begin your planning calendar by writing in all of these interim due-dates. Either use a large wall calendar, or create a special calendar just for this project. Then think hard about how long it will take you to complete each of these tasks. To choose a topic, for example, you may need to do research in the library, or talk with your parents, or read some magazine articles. Altogether, you estimate this will take you three hours, maximum. If the deadline for choosing a topic is in one week, write into your planning calendar two or three sessions when you can put in the three hours' time you think you'll need. Leave yourself a little extra time, too, in case you need more than three hours.

For example, let's say your topic must be chosen by Monday, a week from today. You decide to spend a half-hour tonight talking over your ideas with your parents. On Tuesday after school you'll spend an hour in the library, and on Thursday you'll spend another hour there. That will leave you the whole weekend to spend whatever further time you need choose a topic.

Follow this same process for all the other interim due-dates, so that you build into your schedule the time you'll need to do the work, and you know exactly when you should be working on the project.

Next, write reminders to yourself in your homework diary for each of these scheduled work sessions. If you use an electronic organizer, create reminders alarms for yourself.

Don't expect everything to go perfectly on schedule, especially the first time: planning takes practice! But if you use a planning calendar in this way, you will do much better than your classmates who put off working on their projects, then discover the due date is approaching, then find out there's a lot more work involved than they had thought, and finally end up completing the work hastily at the last minute, or turning it in late.

Learn How to Behave During Formal Examinations

There are proper ways to behave during a formal examination. Master them now, so that when you sit an important exam you don't have to think about how to act.

Avoid disasters such as arriving late, not bringing the necessary materials, or violating the rules and having your grade canceled. Then you can concentrate on the exam itself.

Specific rules will vary from exam to exam, and from school to school. You can pretty well count on the following ones, though, and even if they aren't specified, it's a good idea to follow them:

- Arrive at least 15 minutes early, if possible. This allows time for things to go wrong—a traffic jam, a forgotten calculator—without making you late.
- Use the toilet just before entering the exam room.
- Leave your school bag in your locker. Bring to the room only what's needed for the exam. If you need a ruler, protractor, or calculator, be sure to bring one!
- If you arrive late, do nothing to disturb the test takers. For some exams, no late entries are allowed. In other cases, students may enter late, but only under certain circumstances.
- Enter the exam room silently—all talking stops at the door. Sometimes students are seated by groups, or row by row. Sometimes students may sit where they like, but in most exams you are told where to sit. Listen, and follow instructions.
- During the exam, do not communicate with other students in any way. This even includes making eye contact! In most major exams, communication of any kind—not only talking—will be seen as cheating, and the usual consequence for cheating is a zero on that exam and all other exams in the series. Face forward, and avoid turning your body or your head in a way that might draw suspicion.
- If you have a question or need assistance during the exam, raise your hand and wait *silently* for an invigilator or proctor to come speak with you.
- At the end of the exam, listen carefully to instructions and follow them. When you are dismissed, leave as quietly as possible. Often, other students are still writing

when you are dismissed; if not, it's a good habit to cultivate anyway. Be careful about the noise your chair makes when you stand up, and put some distance between yourself and the exam room before you begin talking. A crowd of students bursting into a hallway can be a serious distraction to those still working on their exams.

Rules to ask about in advance:

- Are you allowed to leave early, if you finish early?
- May you bring a reading book, in case you finish early?
- Are you allowed to bring a water bottle into the exam room?
- Are pencil cases permitted, or should you bring just the pencils and pens?
- Are you allowed to use a calculator? If so, are graphing calculators or programable calculators permitted?
- What dress regulations apply?
- What are the rules regarding late arrival? What should you do if you arrive late?

If you mess up, accept the consequences and learn from them. Better to make a mistake on a school exam in Grade 10 or 11, even if it means receiving a zero, than to make a mistake on an AP, IB, or end-of-school exam in Grade 12 that could endanger your graduation or admission to the university of your choice.

Practice Good Exam-Taking Strategies

Getting Started

Read the instructions and skim all the questions of the whole exam before answering any questions. Be sure no pages are missing from the exam booklet. Be sure whether you should write your answers on the question sheet or on a separate answer sheet. Should you write in pen or pencil? Put your name on the exam booklet and on every one of the answer sheets. Use a highlighting pen to mark important information in the instructions or questions. If a question is unclear, write a note to the teacher explaining how you have interpreted it.

Comprehension Questions

Read the questions first and *then* the passage they're based on. That way, you know what to look for when you read the passage.

Multiple-Choice Questions

If you aren't sure, test researchers say your first hunch is more likely to be correct.

Know how much each question or section is worth, and spend most of your time on the most valuable questions.

Don't get stuck on a difficult question. Skip it, answer the questions you know, and then come back to the difficult ones at the end if you have time.

Essays

Before you begin writing, brainstorm your ideas (web diagrams or mind-maps are excellent) and then plan out the structure of your essay.

State your thesis in the first paragraph.

Be sure that each body paragraph consists of *one* assertion plus all the evidence and argument needed to support it. Lead your reader smoothly from one paragraph to the next with *transitions* or *linking phrases* that reinforce the meaning of your argument.

In the conclusion, try to do more than simply re-state what you've already said. Take your ideas "one step further" by discussing the wider implications or adding your personal judgments.

If you have time, catch your reader's interest by opening the essay with a startling statement, a quotation, or a brief anecdote. Then in your conclusion you can close nicely with a *da capo* ("from the top") ending that returns to your opening by commenting on it, completing it, or adding to it.

Mathematics and Science Tests

Show all your work. Be sure your reasoning is clearly explained, as this is often just as important as the final answer. Never delete or cancel a solution until you have discovered a better one. We learn a great deal from our mistakes, and teachers will be able to help you make improvements if they can see your mistakes and understand where you're making a wrong turn.

If you finish the test or exam early . . .

There are three possibilities: a) the test was too easy for you; b) the test was too hard for you; or c) your answers have been too hasty and careless. First, re-read the entire exam—questions and answers—making any needed changes or additions. Second, re-read it again, starting with the last question and working your way back to the beginning. Why? Reading it backward may help you catch a mistake you missed before. Finally, read through your answers to check for spelling and grammatical mistakes.

Review Tests and Essays When You Get Them Back

What do athletes do after a game or match? They watch the video.

Athletes watch videos of their performances so they can see where they did well and how they need to improve. You can do the same thing—without a video camera—when a teacher hands back your tests and essays.

All of us getting a test back are eager to see our mark. But that's just the beginning. If you want to benefit as much as possible, and avoid making similar mistakes in the future, take the time to review your work in detail, analyze the errors, and work on correcting them.

Some teachers make this easy for you. They mark your work and then note in a written comment what your most common errors were and where you need to improve. In other cases, however, you have to do this work yourself.

If the test consists of short answers—multiple choice, fill in the blank, true-false, etc.—try to figure out the pattern of your wrong answers. Did you miss most of the questions about Napoleon? Did you have trouble with the questions asking you to multiply fractions? What information or skills do you need to avoid these mistakes in the future? If you look over the test and can't find patterns of errors, ask your teacher to help you.

For an essay, there are basically three categories: Content (what you say), Organization (how you arrange your ideas in paragraphs), and Expression (how you use the language, including spelling, grammar, etc.). If the teacher hasn't already commented on your errors in each of these categories, try figuring out from comments in the margins or at the end of the essay how you did in each of these areas. If you're still not sure, ask!

In a history or science essay, the teacher is often most concerned first with Content, and then with Organization. For an English essay, Expression and Organization are often emphasized. Make sure you know what the teacher was looking for on the particular essay you are reviewing. If you made writing errors, list them to see which ones occur most frequently. Do you repeatedly misspell the same word? Do you often make the same mistake with apostrophes? Do you have trouble organizing your ideas into paragraphs so that each paragraph focuses on one idea?

Once you have a good idea of the errors you've made on a test or essay, ask your teacher which one or two of them you should work on first. Don't try to fix everything at once. Work on your errors one by one, and gradually you will see the results. You will know everything you need to know about Napoleon; you will multiply fractions with ease; you will spell that word correctly every time, and your paragraph organization will be excellent. You will feel

like that Wimbledon champion who, a few months earlier, kept hitting her backhands too long. After reviewing the video and making the needed correction of her swing, she put those backhands right where she wanted them, almost every time.

Chapter 9

Three Essential Study Skills

Few students find study skills fascinating. Few teachers teach them as part of their regular classes. Some schools offer courses in study skills, but often the teachers of these courses have little interest or expertise in the subject.

It's unfortunate, because study skills can make a huge difference in a student's achievements.

Nobody expects to play tennis well without learning the essential skills of the game. Why, then, do so many of us expect to acquire good study skills without any effort?

Here's the good news:

You don't really need to take a course or read a whole book about study skills. Master the three skills in this chapter and you will achieve much better results with less time and effort expended.

For 98 percent of you, these three will be plenty. But if you discover that you enjoy developing your study skills, find a good book in this area or take a class on them, and keep learning!

Learn How to Read a Textbook Efficiently

Learn the tricks of good readers, who read faster because . . . they don't read every word!

Instead, they concentrate on the important words and skip lightly over the others. Which ones are important?

- In a sentence, the main nouns and verbs are most important.
- In a paragraph, the first and last sentences are often the most important.
- In a textbook, words in **boldface** type, words in subheadings, and words with boxes drawn around them are the most important.
- In a poem, on the other hand, each word might be important.

As the demands of school increase year after year, you'll find at some point that you simply don't have time to read every word in your textbooks. Here's how to extract the information you need, in a fraction of the time:

1. Read the chapter title, the subtitle if there is one, and any subheadings that occur further on.
2. Go back to the beginning and read only the words that are in **boldface** type. Write them down in your notes, and leave space to fill in their definitions later.
3. Go through the chapter again from the beginning, but this time look only at the illustrations, graphs, charts, etc. Teachers love to photocopy these and put them in

their tests, so even though you may not understand them at first, you should be able to explain them by the time you finish studying the chapter.

4. Look at the end of the chapter. Is there a summary of the chapter's main points? Questions? Ideas for further consideration? Read all such end-of-chapter material. In your notes, write down the key terms and questions, and leave space to write in answers and explanations.
5. Read just the first sentence of each paragraph (often called the "topic sentence"). Once you've done this, you will probably have an excellent understanding of the main ideas—and did you notice how little time it takes to read a chapter using this method?
6. There may be some points in the chapter that you need to understand better. If so, go back to the beginning and read it again in the same way—just the first sentence of each paragraph. This time, however, when you reach a point that needs more explanation, read both the first and last sentences of that paragraph. If reading the last sentence of each paragraph doesn't answer all your questions, go back and read entire paragraphs in the sections where you need more explanation.

Now you can test your understanding by trying to answer the questions at the end of the chapter and by filling in the definitions of all the key terms in your notes. You will be surprised at how many questions you are able to answer by reading just the topic sentence of each paragraph.

Finally, make a note of any questions you still have, and ask your teacher about these points in class.

Using this method, you will read through a textbook chapter much more quickly, understand it better, and have an excellent set of notes to use when preparing for a test.

Try this approach not just with textbooks but with any article or essay you're reading primarily for information. By focusing on the important ideas and information instead of wasting time reading every word, you can both improve your comprehension and reduce the time needed to complete the reading assignment.

Take Notes in a Way That Works for You

Deciding what's important: this is the big challenge of note-taking. After all, if you didn't have to decide what's important, you could just photocopy the page or tape-record the teacher's lecture.

To become a good note-taker you must constantly ask yourself, "What's really important here?" Then you just have to keep practicing. From time to time, ask a teacher to check your notes and tell you whether you have correctly identified the most important ideas and information. Then go back to practicing!

Another challenge of note-taking is abbreviation. Notes should include key words and phrases but not complete sentences. Luckily, you live in the age of email, chat, and text-messaging, so **u alrddy no how 2** do this. Just invent some abbreviations for school notes to add to the ones you use when you're online. (But don't use them in your homework assignments!)

There are numerous note-taking “systems”. You may have to try several before you find one you really like. Here’s my favourite: On each page of notes, leave a right-hand margin that is about one-third the width of the page. It helps to draw a vertical line on the page, showing where this extra-wide margin lies. Use the wide part of each page to take your class notes or reading notes. Use the right-hand margin when you’re reviewing the notes or adding comments the teacher makes about the same material. Add stars, arrows, exclamation points, and anything else that helps organize your notes, make them clearer, and highlight the most important ideas and information. Some people like to use highlighting pens or coloured pencils.

Instead of that method, you may prefer a more visual form of note-taking, such as “mind-maps” or web diagrams. Find a method that works for you, and then change it to make it your own. With time and practice you can become a first-rate note-taker, and this skill will become more valuable each year.

For university students, the ability to take notes is like a fish’s ability to breathe underwater: required! Don’t drown in your schoolwork. Learn to take good notes now, and swim like a fish.

Learn How to Prepare for Tests

Here’s where all the time spent developing good habits really pays off.

Why?

Because if you practice the daily work habits and study habits I’ve already recommended in this book—complete all assignments, read everything you should, review daily, etc.—you won’t need to do much last-minute studying: you’ll already know everything you need to know for the test.

Your friends may be staying up late, memorizing like mad, and speed-reading Acme’s Notes on *Hamlet*. Not you.

- Do some extra review or revision in the days leading up to the test.
- Pay close attention to what the teacher says will be on the test. Often teachers will spend a good deal of time in class preparing students to write the particular sort of test or exam they will have for that class. If you have written any practice or mock exams previously, look them over, and be sure you understand the mistakes you made and how to avoid them in future.
- *Think* about what you’ve learned and how it all fits together.
- Finally, be sure to get plenty of sleep and regular exercise.

That’s it. You’ll do fine!

If you’re really nervous and want more ideas about test preparation, ask your librarian for a good book on study skills with tips on using note cards, reviewing/revising strategies, and so on. But, honestly, if you’ve been cultivating the good Work Habits and Study Habits I suggest, you’ll find that test preparation need not involve a lot of extra effort.



Appendix A

Goal-Setting Aids

All the documents in this Appendix are printed in a reduced size to fit the page of this book.

To print full-sized copies, go to my Web site—

<http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>

(capital letters not required)—and click on the Goal-Setting Aids link. The documents are in PDF format. To read them, you will need a free copy of Acrobat Reader, now called Adobe Reader, which you can download from www.adobe.com if you don't already have it on your computer.

Set a Goal!

Use this sheet when practicing your goal-setting skills.

Set a Goal!

Name _____

Goal (can be counted or measured)	
Action required	
How often?	
Start date	
Monitoring (daily written record)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HW diary + <input type="checkbox"/> wall calendar <input type="checkbox"/> other:
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	

How did I do?

Complete this section right after the end date of your goal.

In trying to achieve this goal, I was . . .

- ☐ Completely successful
- ☐ Mostly successful
- ☐ Somewhat successful
- ☐ Not really successful

As a result, I am going to . . .

- ☐ Revise my goal, and repeat it
- ☐ Repeat it as is, and try harder
- ☐ Choose a new goal

Give details of your achievement:

I ☐ did ☐ did not keep a daily written record in my homework agenda.

I succeeded

____times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Student's signature _____

Date _____

Teacher's initials _____

Form a Habit!

Use this sheet when you have chosen one goal to work on until you form a new habit. (The full version is two pages long.)

Form A Habit!

To create a new habit, repeat your goal for several weeks or even months,
until the new behaviour becomes automatic.

Name _____

Goal (something you can count or measure): _____

Action required: _____

How often: _____

Start date: _____

Monitoring (daily written record): ☒ agenda + ☐ wall calendar ☐ _____

Weekly Assessment

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Week of _____ (date)

I succeeded ___ times/days/classes (circle one) out of ____.

Learning Log

Try the Learning Log if you want to improve your concentration and focus in class.

Learning Log

Name: _____

Subject: _____

Date: _____ Period: ____

1. What I accomplished this lesson: _____
2. Something I learned: _____
2. A question I have: _____
3. Something I'm interested to know more about: _____

Date: _____ Period: ____

1. What I accomplished this lesson: _____
2. Something I learned: _____
2. A question I have: _____
3. Something I'm interested to know more about: _____

Date: _____ Period: ____

1. What I accomplished this lesson: _____
2. Something I learned: _____
2. A question I have: _____
3. Something I'm interested to know more about: _____

Date: _____ Period: ____

1. What I accomplished this lesson: _____
2. Something I learned: _____
2. A question I have: _____
3. Something I'm interested to know more about: _____

Date: _____ Period: ____

1. What I accomplished this lesson: _____
2. Something I learned: _____
2. A question I have: _____
3. Something I'm interested to know more about: _____

Student's Signature _____ Teacher's Initials _____ Parent's Initials _____

©2005 Eric T. MacKnight • May be copied for personal use. • <http://GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com>

Download a full-sized copy of this form at <http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>.

Homework Tracker

Use the Homework Tracker to help improve your homework habits.

Homework Tracker

Name: _____

Day / Date: M T W Th F / _____

Class	Assignment	Date Due	Date Completed

Day / Date: M T W Th F / _____

Class	Assignment	Date Due	Date Completed

Day / Date: M T W Th F / _____

Class	Assignment	Date Due	Date Completed

Day / Date: M T W Th F / _____

Class	Assignment	Date Due	Date Completed

Day / Date: M T W Th F / _____

Class	Assignment	Date Due	Date Completed

©2005 Eric T. MacKnight • May be copied for personal use. • <http://GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com>

Download a full-sized copy of this form at <http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>.

Daily Check Sheet

Ask teachers to fill in this form when you want daily feedback. (See Chapter Four, “Getting Help From Parents and Teachers”.)

Daily Check Sheet

Student _____ Subject _____ Week of _____

MON	Assignment attempted; handed in on time	YES	NO	
	Assignment late. Handed in on _____ at _____.			
		date	time	
	All items completed.	YES	NO	Teacher's Initials
	Homework neatly done; readable.	YES	NO	_____
TUE	Assignment attempted; handed in on time	YES	NO	
	Assignment late. Handed in on _____ at _____.			
		date	time	
	All items completed.	YES	NO	Teacher's Initials
	Homework neatly done; readable.	YES	NO	_____
WED	Assignment attempted; handed in on time	YES	NO	
	Assignment late. Handed in on _____ at _____.			
		date	time	
	All items completed.	YES	NO	Teacher's Initials
	Homework neatly done; readable.	YES	NO	_____
THU	Assignment attempted; handed in on time	YES	NO	
	Assignment late. Handed in on _____ at _____.			
		date	time	
	All items completed.	YES	NO	Teacher's Initials
	Homework neatly done; readable.	YES	NO	_____
FRI	Assignment attempted; handed in on time	YES	NO	
	Assignment late. Handed in on _____ at _____.			
		date	time	
	All items completed.	YES	NO	Teacher's Initials
	Homework neatly done; readable.	YES	NO	_____

Parent's Signature _____ Date _____

Post-Report Evaluation

Use this form (as described in Chapter Two) to find out where your teachers think you need to improve.

Post-Report Evaluation				Name _____	Class _____	Date _____
Subject	#1 Area Needing Improvement	Biggest Obstacle to Improvement	How to Overcome This Obstacle	Goal (to Make the Needed Improvement)		
English						
Maths						

©2005 Eric T. MacKnight • May be copied for personal use. • <http://GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com>

Appendix B

Sample Goals

Personal Habits

Read Every Day

Goal	To read for 15 minutes every day.
Action required	Establish a fixed time and place to read. Eliminate all possible interruptions, and set a timer for 15 minutes.
How often?	Every day.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary, and also on your wall calendar if you wish.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you read every day for 15 full minutes, give yourself a treat.
Revision	If you fell short, repeat for another week. When you read for seven straight days, give yourself that treat. Then continue, with a treat at the end of each successful week, until the reading itself is a treat. At that point—not before—increase the time to 20 minutes.

Arrive on Time

Goal	To arrive on time for every Science class (pick a class for which you're often late).
Action required	Remember! Give yourself an extra five minutes, just to be sure.
How often?	Every class meeting.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary, and also on your wall calendar if you wish.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you are always on time, bravo!
Revision	If you still arrive late sometimes, repeat for another week. When you are able to arrive on time for this one class, add another, then another, until you consistently arrive on time to all your classes.

Have a Question? *Ask Your Teacher!*

Goal	To ask at least one question in every lesson.
Action required	Ask a question in each class. (“May I go to the bathroom?” doesn’t count.) The questions must have something to do with schoolwork.
How often?	In every lesson.
Start date	
Monitoring	In your homework diary, keep a tally class-by-class.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you asked at least one question in 90 percent of your lessons, you’re doing an excellent job.
Revision	If you asked at least one question in less than 50 percent of your classes, reduce your goal to three questions per day and try again.

Drink Lots of Water

Goal	To drink 48 oz. or 1½ litres of water every day.
Action required	Buy a 16-oz. or 50-ml. plastic water bottle. Carry it with you, and drink water often enough to fill and empty it three times by the end of each day.
How often?	Daily.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a tally of every time you refill the bottle in your homework diary.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you drank your full quota of water every day, congratulations!
Revision	If you had trouble drinking a full 48 oz. or 1½ litres every day, repeat for another week until you succeed.

Exercise Regularly

Goal	To exercise three times every week.
Action required	Exercise for at least 20 minutes on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. (Change these days, if necessary, to ones more convenient for you.)
How often?	Three times a week.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a record in your homework diary or on your wall calendar. (Note: You don’t have to exercise the same way each day!)
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you exercised every Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday, congratulations! If not, repeat as needed until regular exercise becomes a well-established habit.
Revision	Your success depends on consistency over a long period of time. For that reason, I suggest that you continue repeating this goal, along with other goals you may be working on, for at least six months.

Eat Properly, Get Enough Sleep, and Stay Drug-Free

Goal	To eat a proper breakfast every morning.
Action required	Eat breakfast!
How often?	Daily.
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a record in your homework diary or on your wall calendar.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you ate a proper breakfast every day, congratulations! If not, repeat as needed until eating breakfast becomes a well-established habit.
Revision	If you already have bad habits in this area, begin by aiming to eat a proper breakfast at least three times a week, and then increase your goal gradually to seven times a week.

Work Habits

Use a Homework Diary in Every Class, Every Day

Goal	To use a homework diary in every class.
Action required	Bring your diary to school every day. Take it to every class in which homework is assigned. When you first arrive in class, put your diary on your desktop. Record the homework for each class. If there is no homework that day, write something like "Science: No HW".
How often?	Every class.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use a wall calendar at home to record your success rate every evening.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	Anything less than 90 percent success is unsatisfactory.
Revision	Repeat as needed until you have established a firm habit of using your homework diary. For more rapid success, work on this goal with a classmate. When one forgets, the other may remember.

Use Class Time Productively

Goal	To stay on task in English class. (Substitute the class where you need most to improve your concentration.)
Action required	Complete one section of the Learning Log for every English lesson.
How often?	Each English lesson.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use the Learning Log (see Appendix A).
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	(1) If you succeeded in recording something you learned, a question you had, and something you wanted to learn more about—for every English lesson during the week—congratulations! If not, repeat as needed until concentrating in class becomes a well-established habit. (2) Ask your teacher if he or she noticed any improvement in your performance in class during the week. If you have trouble identifying something you learned, a question, and something you would like to learn more about, enlist the help of your teacher or your parents. They may be able to suggest some ideas that will help you complete these items.
Revision	Repeat as needed, one class at a time. Even though you don't complete the Learning Log for every class, try to pay attention in each class as if you were filling out the Learning Log there, too. Remember that habits are created by repetition. Repeat often enough, for long enough, and <i>voila!</i> you've created a habit.

Complete All Your Assignments

Goal	To complete all assignments.
Action required	Complete every assignment!
How often?	Every assignment.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use the Homework Tracker (see Appendix A) to record each assignment, its due date, and the date you actually complete it.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you completed every assignment, bravo! If you failed to complete one or more assignments, you need to work harder at establishing this good habit.
Revision	For some goals, an 80 percent or 90 percent success rate is very good. In this case, however, anything less than 100 percent is unacceptable. So if you fell short during your first attempt, try again. Ask your parents to help by giving you reminders, checking your Homework Tracker, etc. If you have very bad habits in this area, ask your teachers to use the Daily Check Sheet (see Appendix A) to help you keep on track.

Do homework as Soon as It's Assigned—Not the Day Before It's Due!

Goal	To complete homework as soon as it's assigned.
Action required	Use the Homework Tracker (see Appendix A). Do all homework for one subject the day it's assigned. If the homework will take more than one day to complete, <i>start</i> working on it the day it's assigned.
How often?	Each homework assignment for English (or choose one of your other classes.)
Start date	
Monitoring	Complete one section of the Homework Tracker for every English lesson.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	Some homework assignments can't be done right away, but you can at least start on most of them and should be able to complete many of them. To measure your success, first put aside any assignments that were impossible to complete immediately. For the remaining ones, if you did 80 percent or more of them the day they were assigned, you are doing an excellent job in this area.
Revision	Repeat as needed, one class at a time. As you improve, add more subjects until you are doing all of your homework right away, instead of putting it off.

Hand in Work on Time

Goal	To complete all assignments on time.
Action required	Complete every assignment on time!
How often?	Every assignment.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use the Homework Tracker to record every assignment, its due date, and the date you actually complete it.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you turned in at least 95 percent of your assignments on time, congratulations! If you didn't reach this level, you need to improve. (Note: If you have a legitimate reason for handing an assignment in late, you can count it as being "on time".)
Revision	If you have a bad habit of handing in work late, repeat this goal-setting exercise. Ask your parents to help by giving you reminders and checking your Homework Tracker. If you have very bad habits in this area, ask your teachers to use the Daily Check Sheet (see Appendix A) to help you keep on track.

Come to Class Prepared

Goal	To arrive for classes with all needed materials.
Action required	Take 15 seconds before heading off to each class to think about what you need to bring.
How often?	Every class.
Start date	
Monitoring	Use your homework diary to record your success or failure for each class.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you were prepared for class 90 percent of the time or better, congratulations!
Revision	If you need to improve, repeat this goal-setting exercise until your success consistently reaches 95 percent or better. If you have bad habits in this area, spend five minutes each evening making a list in your homework diary of needed materials for each of the next day's classes.

Study Habits

Review Every Day

Goal	To review each of your classes for five minutes.
Action required	Take five minutes to remember what happened in class, look over any notes you took, read through any handouts you were given, etc.
How often?	Every day
Start date	
Monitoring	Keep a daily record in your homework diary.
Time limit	One week. End date:
Measure of success	If you reviewed all your classes at least four days out of five, that's pretty good.
Revision	Repeat until nightly review of all your classes becomes automatic.

Appendix C

A Note on Learning Disabilities

If you have a learning disability, you face extra challenges, but you can still improve your habits and your work.

Only in the last few years have scientists and teachers begun to understand learning disabilities and how they can be dealt with. There is still much that we don't understand. But learning-disabled students today are luckier than they would have been in the past, when those who couldn't learn in the way that schools demanded were often labeled as "dumb". Many such students suffered years of unhappiness in schools that could not recognize their talents. Sometimes they were sent off to learn a trade, when they really could have continued toward a university education. Sometimes they simply dropped out of school.

Today we know that there are many ways to learn, and we know that brilliant, talented people can also have learning disabilities. We also know a good deal about how to overcome or work around a learning disability so that these students can succeed in school and go on to university if they wish to.

Many students struggle with learning disabilities that have not been diagnosed. They don't understand why they keep having problems, and they often blame themselves. "I'm stupid," they think, or "I'm just no good in school." Some have great difficulty spelling, and no matter how much they try, they keep making errors. Or they have trouble reading because they don't see the words clearly, or they keep reversing the correct order of letters and numbers. The mistakes they make don't seem to follow any pattern, because even if, for example, they learn to spell a particular word, they continue to misspell it. Or they misspell it sometimes but not all the time.

If those descriptions seem to apply to you and you haven't been tested for a learning disability, talk to your parents, and ask a teacher or school counselor about the possibility of being tested.

Students who find out they have a learning disability generally respond in one of two ways. Some feel great relief—"I'm not stupid after all!"—and are inspired to work harder and understand their disability so they can master it. Others regard a learning disability as an

automatic excuse: “Oh, I can’t do that; I’m learning-disabled, you know.” If you are diagnosed as having a learning disability, it’s up to you to respond in a positive way.

Often the biggest problem is not the disability itself but the shame and embarrassment learning-disabled students feel. The T-shirt slogans may declare, “Dare to be different!” But actually *being* different is not always easy, or comfortable. However, I have seen many learning-disabled students who, with time and support, have found ways to succeed in school socially, athletically, and academically. The key? They accept that they have a disability, and discover that it doesn’t have to be such a big deal.

One of my most impressive students was a big, strong athletic boy in Grade 12. He had been diagnosed with severe ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and had a very tough time concentrating in class because he was so easily distracted. But his response was magnificent. Outside class, he was sociable and well-liked, but once class started he was all business. He sat at one end of the front row and stood his three-ring binder up on one side of his desktop, to make a screen between himself and the student at the next desk. If other students disturbed him, he would turn in his chair and shush them—and because he was so big, and so serious about concentrating, they would quiet right down. He worked hard to deal with his disability, and he ended up doing quite well.

If you have a learning disability, some of the advice in this book may need to be modified for you. But most of it still applies. Find expert advice about your disability, follow it, and keep working. I’m confident that with a positive attitude, hard work, and good habits, you’ll find ways to succeed.

Appendix D

A Note to Parents and Teachers: How You Can Help

Parents of younger children have a great opportunity to help their kids develop good habits. Learning not to procrastinate, for example, is much easier when the homework load is light. Make sure the work is done as soon as it's assigned and *before* the TV-watching and computer games begin. Establish a regular work space for your child that is free of distractions and interruptions. Set up a simple filing system for papers, and help your child learn to use it. Help your child practice moral courage, take responsibility for his or her mistakes, and develop the other Personal Habits described in Part Two. Above all, encourage your child to love reading. With a firm foundation of these good habits, children will be well equipped to succeed both socially and academically in the years ahead.

Parents of teenagers, as we all know, have a more challenging task. Adolescents yearn for independence, but need lots of help and support. They often resent offers of help, however, while at the same time wishing they were little kids again. Parents succeed best, I think, when they remain always ready to help but never actually attempt to help without a clear invitation. If your teen is not a strong reader, or learns best by doing rather than reading, you may be able to serve as the reader of this book for him or her. You will also be able to help by setting up systems, calendars, reminders, etc. Read Chapter Four, "Getting Help From Parents & Teachers" for further ideas, but remember that you help your teen most when he or she is able to succeed without you. Encourage your son or daughter to work on good habits together with a friend or classmate—a bit of competition and support can do wonders.

Choosing goals can be a tricky business for both parents and teachers. As a rule, I think it's a mistake to choose a goal for a teenager, because a strong personal investment in the goal is vital to success in achieving it. If it's *your* goal, not theirs, success is unlikely. If you do suggest a goal, it's better to do so in the "practice" stage of learning how to set and achieve them. When it comes to working on a goal for an extended period to form a new habit, the student must choose the goal and really want to achieve it. Having said that, I would pick two of the habits in this book as most essential: "Read every day" and "Use a homework diary in every class, every day".

Teachers who want to introduce goal-setting to their classes cannot avoid the problem of imposing goals on kids, if only for this reason: as soon as every student is expected to choose a goal, the choice is more or less forced. Of course the same might be said about everything

that teachers ask of students, and we know that students do, nevertheless, learn and grow. I will repeat, though, that ideally the goal should be the student's choice, not yours.

To work on good habits with a whole class, here's a rough plan. Use the first ten weeks or so to introduce the importance of good habits, discuss how habits are formed, etc., and practice goal-setting. Use my Set a Goal! form (see Appendix A). Once a routine is established, updating the forms should take 15 minutes of class time, once a week. When the class understands how to write a clearly defined goal, how to keep a daily record of success, and how to evaluate one's achievement at the end of the week, you can ask students to choose *one* goal and work on it over several weeks or months, using the Form a Habit! sheets in Appendix A.

Students who have difficulty with goal-setting usually fail to keep a daily record of their goal-setting activity. The best place, by far, for this record-keeping is their school agenda or homework diary. All too often, however, the same students who fail to keep a daily record of goal-setting activities rarely, if ever, use their school agendas for homework assignments.

Teachers who wish to teach goal-setting can encourage students to use their homework diaries through a simple technique: ask students at the beginning of each class session to open their diaries. Soon this routine will become automatic. Among other benefits, this technique helps teach your students the good habit of coming into class, sitting down, and taking out the materials they need for the lesson. It also prompts them to use their diaries, which will help them to stay on track with assignments and due dates in all their classes. Finally, by using this technique you will find that your lessons begin more crisply, with less time wasted trying to focus everyone's attention.

Once the diaries are out, I simply go to each student and check to see whether there is a note about the previous day's goal-setting activity. Some diaries have a space set aside for this. If not, pick a good spot, and ask all students to keep their goal-setting records there; this speeds up your daily circuit around the classroom. Keep the notation system quick and easy: often it can be as simple as a check mark (✓) to indicate yes, I did it, or an X to indicate no, I didn't. I make sure something is recorded, and then initial for that day.

I don't spend much time on this. Once the routine becomes familiar, it takes only a minute or two to check everyone's homework diary. The simple fact of me checking, every day, is a powerful reminder to students, and almost all of them quickly get into the habit of keeping a daily written record of their goal-setting activities. Once this habit is acquired, the students' success with goal-setting soars.

Finally, convince your principal to establish a schoolwide policy that every teacher must require and enforce the daily use of homework diaries. Even when there is no homework, students should write "History: no HW" in their diaries. This single habit will improve student performance, but if only a few teachers require the use of diaries, the behaviour will be inconsistent and few students will use their diaries regularly.

Index

G

Goals

- digital organizer, 9
- hard to define, 8
- monitoring progress, 8

H

Habits

- how do habits form?, iv
- two most important, 9

I

Improvement, 4, 5

P

Parents, 11

Punctuation, i

R

Repetition, iv

Report cards, 5

S

Spelling, i

T

Teachers

- getting help from teachers, 12

For Further Information

You may have questions such as these:

- **Where can I buy more copies of *Good Habits, Good Students*?**
- **Where can I find more information about building good habits?**
- **Where can I find corrections and supplements to the edition of *Good Habits, Good Students* that I am reading?**
- **How can I contact the author?**

Find the answers to these questions and others on my Web site:

<http://www.GoodHabitsGoodStudents.com/>

About the Author:

Eric MacKnight has taught for more than twenty years in public, independent, and international schools in Canada, the United States, Morocco, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, and China. He and his wife—also a school teacher—have two children.

About the Illustrator:

Michelle Jennison graduated from Central Saint Martin's College of Art and Design in London with a Master of Arts degree in illustration in 1997. Since then, she has worked as a professional illustrator for editorial, publishing and design clients.

